

ART AND IMMORTALITY IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

MEHMET-ALI ATAÇ



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Discussions of apocalyptic thought and its sources in the ancient Near East, particularly Mesopotamia, have a long scholarly history, with a renewed interest and focus in recent decades. Outside Assyriological scholarship as well, studies of the apocalyptic give significant credit to the ancient Near East, especially Babylonia and Iran, as potential sources for the manifestations of this phenomenon in the Hellenistic period. The emphasis on kingship and empire in apocalyptic modes of thinking warrants that special attention be paid to the regal art of ancient Mesopotamia and adjacent areas in its potential to express the relevant notions. In this book, Mehmet-Ali Ataç demonstrates the importance of visual evidence as a source for apocalyptic thought. Focusing on the so-called investiture painting from Mari, he relates it to parallel evidence from the visual traditions of the Assyrian Empire, ancient Egypt, and Hittite Anatolia.

Mehmet-Ali Ataç studied architecture, art history, and archaeology, earning his Ph.D. from Harvard University, Massachusetts in 2003. He was Whiting Post-doctoral Fellow in the Humanities at Princeton University, New Jersey (2003–4) and Hetty Goldman Member in the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton (2010–11). From 2004 to 2015, he taught at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania. A scholar of the art of the ancient Near East, he is the author of *The Mythology of Kingship in Neo-Assyrian Art* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

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In spite of sadly insufficient exploration, archaeological research does enable us to see that Teotihuacan reflects the image of infinite cycles, within which the Law of the Centre prevents the splitting asunder of opposing forces. These cycles, based upon the revolutions of the planets and upon laborious calculations, include the simplest – the yearly death and resurrection of Nature – and spread outward to embrace immense units. These great time cycles correspond to the mystic search for moments of supreme liberation, that is, of union between the individual and the cosmic soul, time and eternity, the finite and the infinite.

Laurette Séjourné, *Burning Water: Thought and Religion in Ancient Mexico*

Those who, indeed, attempt to deal with the unsolved problems of archaeology by an analysis and exegesis of meanings and contexts may expect to be accused of “reading into” their material meanings that are not in it. They will reply that the archaeologist or philologist who is not also a metaphysician must inevitably, sooner or later, find himself before a blank wall, which he cannot penetrate.

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, “Walter Andrae’s *Die ionische Säule: Bauform oder Symbol?*: A Review”

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The original title I had proposed for this study was “Art and Apocalyptic in the Ancient Near East.” I thank my editor Asya Graf for the simpler and more inclusive alternative “Art and Immortality in the Ancient Near East” and her sustained support throughout the review process; and Beatrice Rehl for seeing me through the final stages of the manuscript preparation. My sincere thanks also to the anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press for criticism and references that I would not have known otherwise. Finally, many interesting conversations on apocalyptic thought, ancient and modern, took place at home in Ankara when I visited my parents, Yıldız-Mete Ataç, and sister, C. Akça Ataç, over the years, to all of whom I am also always indebted for emotional support.

ABBREVIATIONS

AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
JANER	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
M.A.R.I	<i>Mari: Annales de recherches interdisciplinaires</i>
RIA	<i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie</i>
LÄ	<i>Lexikon der Ägyptologie</i>
ZÄS	<i>Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</i>

INTRODUCTION

TOWARD A METAPHYSICS OF THE ART OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

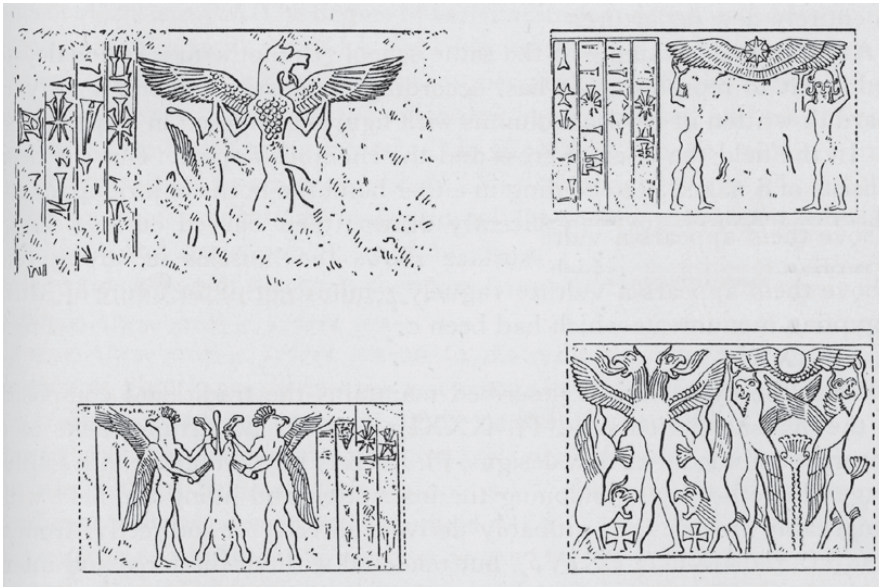
No study on the iconography of the ancient Near East can avoid a critical overview of the current state of the field before laying out its conceptual and interpretive bases. The focused analysis of this artistic tradition is a rather young domain of inquiry. It developed in the first half of the twentieth century, through the studies of scholars such as Elizabeth Douglas Van Buren, Henri Frankfort, Henrietta Groenewegen-Frankfort, Helene Kantor, and Anton Moortgat.¹ Despite the contributions of further generations of scholars, the study of the visual language of the ancient Near East has not fully acquired the autonomy and authority it deserves. On the one hand, the highly positivistic discipline of Assyriology remains a force to reckon with.² On the other hand, current trends in Archaeology tend to see the study of images as a non-archaeological category of inquiry.³

The scholars who initiated the study of the art of the ancient Near East were themselves great archaeologists. The surveys of Henri Frankfort and Anton Moortgat highlighted a unity of tradition in the art and monuments of ancient Mesopotamia. Through frequent comparison and cross-reference, they examined the works of art of any particular period of ancient Mesopotamian history often in relation to those of other periods, without losing sight of the continuum in figural types and visual paradigms.⁴ The work of Douglas Van Buren on the flowing vase and that of Marie-Thérèse

Barrelet on the “investiture” painting from the palace at Mari are excellent examples of a previous generation’s diachronic approach to the art of the ancient Near East that acknowledges and engages fruitfully with threads of unbroken continuity in the art of ancient Mesopotamia across the ages.⁵ In the later years, Margaret C. Root’s 1979 study on the king and kingship in the art of the Achaemenid Empire (ca. 550–331 BCE) also underscored continuity among ancient Near Eastern visual traditions in the forging of Persian imperial imagery.⁶ This study not only showed the inherent commensurability of different visual idioms, such as Assyrian and Egyptian, within a new eclectic Near Eastern rubric, but also stressed that the adoption of Mesopotamian and Egyptian visual paradigms by the host culture preserved aspects of their original meaning.

Despite many valuable and innovative contributions to the study of the art of the ancient Near East in many of its facets since its initial emergence as a field of inquiry, what seems to have been lost in the present era of scholarship is the sense of unity in visual language among its periods and geographic areas and the timeless and philosophical concepts conveyed by this language. These concepts form a supra-textual medium of signification, or an underlying mythology, embedded in royal-sponsored art. In a short 1949 monograph, Anton Moortgat highlighted some of these notions under the umbrella term *Unsterblichkeitsglaube*, the “immortality belief.”⁷ Driving the intellectual agenda of the book is the tenet that notions of regeneration, conquest of evil and death, and immortalization are the overarching, unchanging, and timeless themes of the art of ancient Mesopotamia and adjacent areas, such as Anatolia and Iran. It was primarily the visual guise in which these themes were presented that changed from era to era in accordance with the varying styles and artistic conventions.⁸ The relevant concepts were expressed primarily by the hieratic or formulaic elements of the ancient Near East, such as heraldic compositions bringing together animals and plants, “sacred trees,” the royal figure in cultic roles, “symposium” scenes, hunt and contest scenes, and the defeat of enemies.

Moortgat wondered how certain key themes conveyed in the art of the Uruk (ca. 4000–3100 BCE) and Jemdet Nasr (ca. 3100–2900 BCE) periods of ancient Mesopotamia endured, finding expression as late as the art of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (883–612 BCE). He posited that the “immortality belief” permeated the artistic traditions of later Mesopotamian antiquity, especially the Hurro-Mesopotamian and Assyrian designs of “sacred trees” surmounted by winged disks (Fig. 1), with the connection between the tree and the sun paradigmatic of that between Tammuz and a solar deity.⁹ Moortgat found the relevant ideas in the Iron Age relief sculpture of Tell Halaf and the art of the Achaemenid Persian Empire as well.¹⁰ Indeed, what Moortgat probed in this short monograph is the symbolic language of the art of the ancient Near East,



1. Drawings of Middle Assyrian cylinder seal impressions. From Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, 187, "Text-figs. 56–59."

a much more autonomous and unchanging quality of this artistic tradition than ordinarily acknowledged.

The fundamentals of and continuum in the visual language of the ancient Near East have been largely forgotten or neglected by the trends dominating our scholarship today in favor of approaches that do not encourage exploring those timeless elements so central to systems of intellectual thought and visual signification in the ancient world. This visual language needs to be retrieved and revived. It should be studied again with renewed analytical rigor and with the benefit of the increase in historical knowledge about the ancient Near East since the time of the early scholars. Particularly Moortgat's views of the overarching trends of meaning in the art of ancient Mesopotamia explored in *Tammuz*, as discussed further below, are crucial and worthy of being furthered by fresh inquiry.

In an article on the role of religion in Achaemenid imperialism, Bruce Lincoln has signaled that current scholarship has not come up with updated paradigms for the study of ancient Near Eastern conceptions of kingship and its material or visual correlates beyond axes of politics, administration, and economy.¹¹ Lincoln's case in point is the relief program at Persepolis, which he basically (re)interprets from an ancient Iranian religious vantage point as the reunification of an ideal world order shattered and fragmented as a result of the primeval attack of evil, the Lie, against it. The restoration of this dissolved world, material and spiritual, for which the Persepolis tribute processions are

a metaphor, takes place under the aegis of a sacral king, “as history ends and a state of eschatological perfection opens onto eternity, thanks to the work of the Achaemenian king, the Persian army, and the tribute bearers of every land-and-people.”¹²

Lincoln has further stressed that such an interpretation would constitute a much more appropriate alternative to a “secular model of political economy” driven by conceptions of tribute and domination.¹³ As Root’s work, *King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art*, had demonstrated, the building blocks of the Persian imperial imagery go back to remoter antiquity and the older empires of the Near East not only in their formal characteristics but also in their semantic implications; and hence the necessity to take into consideration in their study as well theological matters analogous to those tackled by Lincoln. Indeed, Lincoln’s illuminating essay could be complemented by Root’s reading of the tribute processions at Persepolis as modeled after the Mesopotamo-Egyptian presentation scenes in which devotees in Mesopotamia and candidates of immortalization in Egypt are led by the hand to a supreme divinity.¹⁴ In ancient Egypt, this god is Osiris, Lord of the Netherworld, and the presentation to him is for judgment in the beyond, the successful outcome of which is certainly immortalization, or “apotheosis,” a term Root used to good effect in a later study.¹⁵

Concentrating on the philosophical symbolism of a particular geographic and chronological segment of the art of the ancient Near East, the present book attempts to bring back to its study a renewed impetus in addressing religious perspectives. It proposes to add onto Moortgat’s conceptions of immortalization those of sacral time, eternity, and eschatology as closely relevant. My ultimate objective is to delineate a metaphysics of the art of the ancient Near East more thoroughly and systematically than has hitherto been conducted. To that end, my emphasis is on the art of those eras when polities in Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Egypt were aligned ideologically and culturally, the Middle and Late Bronze Age, corresponding roughly to the first and second halves of the second millennium BCE, respectively, and the afterlife of their artistic heritage in the Neo-Assyrian Empire of the Iron Age in the first millennium BCE. For the purposes of this study, by the designation “Near East,” I refer to Mesopotamia, Syria, Anatolia, and Egypt, without engaging closely with the material culture of Iran.

The primary era of ancient Iran that would be the most relevant to the present focus on sacral kingship and eschatology is the Achaemenid Persian Empire. The latter, however, would necessitate its own study from this angle, given the richness of its remains and the expansiveness of the scholarship devoted to it. Sources from Iran revolving around the Zoroastrian doctrine are perhaps the most explicit and informative in discussions of eschatology in the wider ancient Near East. I make some use of them here, particularly

in the footnotes of [Chapters 5](#) and [6](#), with the understanding, however, that the difficult but much-needed task of reading Achaemenid Persian art against the backdrop of ancient Iranian religious traditions should be undertaken as a separate endeavor.¹⁶ In this respect, while ancient Iranian lore is an indispensable aspect of the present intellectual agenda, the material remains of the Achaemenid Persian Empire lie outside the parameters of chronology and feasibility established for this study.

In *The Mythology of Kingship in Neo-Assyrian Art*,¹⁷ I dealt with matters of a symbolic and sacral language embedded in the relief sculpture of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Here, I would like to take both a step forward and backward. Forward in that I would like to extend the same approach to a greater number of artistic traditions belonging to a wider geographic and chronological range, addressing additional themes. Backward in that I would like to step back in time to eras much earlier than the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and explore the background in image and thought that informed this highly complex final crystallization in Mesopotamia of notions of immortalization and eternity before they were summed up in pure emblematic form in the art of the Achaemenid Persian Empire.

THE CORPUS OF IMAGES

Even though in this study I treat a wide range of visual depictions, I concentrate discussions on a few reference or pilot images that guide my analyses. Their prominence here is on account of their being among the most condensed emblematic, even encyclopedic, works of art surviving from ancient Mesopotamia in the expression of hieratic concepts. Central to my study is a thorough (re-)examination of the so-called investiture painting from the Old Babylonian (ca. 1894–1595 BCE) palace at Mari ([Fig. 2](#)). Moortgat included this work of art in his study on the “immortality belief” and acknowledged its importance by pointing out that the image contained all the age-old motifs of ancient Mesopotamia, and later of all ancient Near East.¹⁸ Surprisingly, however, his treatment of the work of art is brief, with no extensive interpretive analysis.

While the “investiture” painting is extremely well known within the study of the ancient Near East, there is little familiarity with it in the larger field of art history. The painting is crucial in the history of ancient art in its constituting the foundation to what comes later in the artistic traditions of the Near East in terms of an interculturally shared imagery of rule and cosmos. Furthermore, the image is arguably a visual repository of conceptions of sacral time and eternity. As such, it is the principal index for the ideas explored in this essay. Its fresh treatment would be timely both for opening up its discussion beyond matters of Old Babylonian Mari politics and history within the



2. Reproduction of the “investiture” painting from the palace at Mari, Old Babylonian period. Paris, Louvre. © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY.

study of the ancient Near East and making it known to a wider audience of art historians.

The second key image is the celebrated “sacred tree” slab from the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE) in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud (Fig. 3), an image of wide-ranging scholarly interest, but so far not approached from perspectives of sacral time and eschatology. I treat it here as a counterpart image to the “investiture” painting from the first millennium BCE on account of their sharing compositional and cosmological traits. As for the third pilot image, it is another well-known work of art from the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the “Garden Scene,” or “Garden Party” of Ashurbanipal (668–627 BCE) from his North Palace at Nineveh (Fig. 4), also an image that has so far been analyzed and interpreted mostly from the point of view of imperial success and prosperity, but arguably the unobtrusive summation of all the key metaphysical concepts I address in this study.

Chapter 1 introduces the Mari painting and highlights its crucial role in the present essay within an overview of the intellectual agenda of the book. Chapter 2 provides an interpretive description, or iconographic analysis, of the Mari painting, presenting it as a highly original production that looks both backward and forward within the continuum of ancient Near Eastern visual traditions. Chapter 3 lays out the ancient Mesopotamian Flood myth as a paradigm for analyzing the Mari painting and for approaching notions of sacral time and eternity expressed in it. It also offers a parallel analysis of the Assyrian “sacred tree” slab from the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II within the same framework.



3. The “sacred tree” relief panel from the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE) in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud, Neo-Assyrian period. London, British Museum. Photo: author.



4. The so-called Garden Scene or Garden Party of Ashurbanipal, North Palace at Nineveh, Neo-Assyrian period BCE. London, British Museum. Photo: author.

[Chapter 4](#) is a study on ornament, with a focus on the motif of the running spirals in both the Mari painting and other counterpart traditions, especially the artistic record of Egypt and Anatolia. It regards the running spiral design as a macro-cosmic visualization of sacral time in both its fundamental aspects of linear duration and cyclical revolution, arguing for it a key role in the iconography of the Mari painting. [Chapter 5](#) integrates the visual analyses conducted in the previous chapters more directly with a discussion of possible conceptions of eschatology and the apocalyptic in the ancient Near East. This is also the chapter that focuses on the visual record of the Late Bronze Age empires of the Near East, particularly Egypt and Hatti, in establishing conceptual

and chronological links between the Mari painting and the art of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. It proposes to see the Mari painting as the earliest extant apocalyptic image in a programmatic sense in the history of art. [Chapter 6](#) is a focused interpretive analysis of Ashurbanipal's "Garden Scene," the chronologically latest work to be addressed in this book. As the final chapter, it offers the ground for a syncretistic treatment of notions of immortalization, paradise, and eschatology within the wider ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean worlds, particularly through the exemplar of Vergil's "empire without end."¹⁹ On account of its featuring the mural crown, the relief also enables a discussion of conceptions of the sacred, or "eternal," city, central to Near Eastern modes of eschatological thought.

QUESTIONS OF TEXT AND IMAGE

Conceptions of sacral time and eschatology in the ancient Near East may have found far better and more systematic expression in the condensed emblematic modes the visual arts offer than the textual format would allow. In the ancient Near East, purely philosophical or speculative writings in the discursive mode hardly existed.²⁰ Texts would not have been devoid of traces of these notions, however, so they should certainly be mined as thoroughly as possible to that end. But the purest and most direct expression of the relevant concepts should be sought in expressions of visual thinking, images. In this sense, the visual language of the art of the ancient Near East is supra-textual. Not every answer or interpretive referent about images is available in texts, since images contained special knowledge.

We need not rehearse the long-standing views and statements on text–image relations in the study of the art of the ancient Near East. It has by now been fully established that despite many overlaps between them, images are not illustrations of texts. As expressed succinctly by Irene Winter in her contribution to *Assyria 1995*:

the visual domain contains within it primary information, as well as unique structures of knowledge – oftentimes in parallel or complementary with, occasionally even quite distinct from, the textual record. Consequently, the visual needs to be studied with the full analytical arsenal available to us – art historical, archaeological, anthropological, and textual – and *on its own terms*.²¹

Once we have ascertained that we will not be able to find all the solutions to understanding images in texts, we should develop methods and perspectives to analyze images from the ancient Near East as corpora of information with much greater autonomy than has hitherto been attributed to them by Assyriology. In the study of the art of ancient Mesopotamia, such an

endeavor might entail the combined effort of following the visual cues in the relevant compositions in hearkening to their semantic potential; engaging in comparisons with other, earlier and later, ancient Mesopotamian images of similar compositional and symbolic principles; making use of some of the deep-seated affinities in modes of thought and visual representation between ancient Mesopotamia and other counterpart traditions such as Egypt, Syria, and Anatolia; in addition to making the most of the mythological texts and royal inscriptions of ancient Mesopotamia in drawing referents that would inform the analysis.

To that end, we ought to approach images as though we were solving puzzles. We should always be suspicious of the presence in images of matters that we might not expect to find in them within the current spectrum of predictable and familiar explanations, such as political ideology, ethnic and social identity, successful kingship, the king's upholding the cosmic order, the king's constituting a bridge between society and divinity, legitimacy, glorification, apotropaic functions, fertility of the land and abundance of natural resources (the list can be longer). Unless we take the inevitable risks of over-interpreting or not hitting the mark in such an alternative endeavor, we are doomed to remain in the comfort zone we have created for ourselves. In this respect, engaging with the language of images is by definition and nature a double-edged endeavor. It is a domain of inquiry for which "evidence" as such is hardly a definitive criterion. Unless one interviewed the artists who produced the relevant images, we might never know what they are about. Therefore, any judgment of interpretive analyses of images along the axes of "right" or "wrong" and "convincing" or "unconvincing" is inevitably subjective as well.

The language of images has an inherent crypticism. Not that crypticism does not exist in texts; certain texts in ancient Mesopotamia do identify themselves as containing esoteric knowledge.²² Through figure, ornament, color, and composition, an image could "write everything out" and be straightforward, with no tricks, in visual language, and still maintain its opaqueness. It is far more practical to keep a visual language internal and secret than a verbal one. In this study, I make extensive use of texts inasmuch as they have the capacity and authority to illuminate images, without losing sight of that vast domain of signification that belongs to images alone. The analysis of that domain is not without a speculative, indeed intuitive, dimension, as acknowledged and established by Erwin Panofsky's seminal 1939 study on iconographic method.²³

TAMMUZ AND GILGAMESH

In addition to the designation "immortality belief," Moortgat referred to the philosophical notions embedded in the art of ancient Mesopotamia as the "Tammuz belief," seeing in Tammuz the prototype of all ancient Near Eastern

vegetal symbols of life and regeneration.²⁴ He juxtaposed Gilgamesh, the model for many for the failure to find immortality, with Tammuz, the Semitic name of the Sumerian Dumuzi, the god who dies with the harvested grain every summer and returns with the sprouting of vegetation in the spring, the paradigm for cyclical regeneration. Moortgat pointed out that Gilgamesh was the antithesis of Tammuz. With Gilgamesh, there was a turning point in the cultural tradition of ancient Mesopotamia; a king was created out of the priest, an enemy of Inanna/Ishtar grew out of her consort. Thus, Gilgamesh was a “tragic hero” in his “failure” to attain eternal life, the transformation of the god-man represented by Tammuz into a royal and heroic figure.²⁵

Arguing for a greater relevance of a pristine Tammuz-based model to the perennial aspects of the art of the ancient Near East than a Gilgamesh-based one, Moortgat posited that it was the survival of the “Tammuz belief” in ancient Mesopotamia that had its stamp on the visual arts. He indicated that the “Tammuz *mysterium*” never came to an end; rather, in time it was translated into state religions dominated by gods such as Enlil, Marduk, and Shamash. The turning point in this regard is identified by Moortgat as the Old Babylonian period, when the mysteries of Inanna and Tammuz were assimilated into conceptions of astral deities, hero gods, and creation myths.²⁶

The artistic record is perhaps the best evidence that speaks against the widespread perception in Assyriology that in ancient Mesopotamian culture, based especially on a literal reading of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the view of death was about man’s accepting his fate that he could not find immortality.²⁷ Accordingly, it was at most through his deeds, accomplishments, and progeny that man could make a name for himself on this side of time, conceptions that all too readily strike a chord with modern perceptions of human existence. Discussions of immortalization in the artistic record and intellectual perspective of the ancient Near East, however, need not be confined to those centered on becoming undying in the flesh. In ancient Mesopotamian texts, it is only the Flood Hero who reaches this state. His physical immortalization is commensurate only with a supra-sensory locale, the so-called Mouth of the Rivers according to the Standard Babylonian version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* from the Neo-Assyrian period, and the Dilmun of the *Sumerian Flood Story* from the Old Babylonian. Ancient Mesopotamian thought clearly depicts godlike immortalization attained by a living human being solely within the context of a primeval era, the benchmark for which is the Flood, and in a paradisiac terrestrial domain.

In the epic, Gilgamesh is a post-diluvian “aspirant,” the sage of an era when the capacity of attaining immortality while still alive was unavailable. His making the journey to the land of the Flood Hero, however, is already indicative of his special status, as he is two-thirds god, and the land of the Flood Hero is not within ordinary human reach. In other words, Gilgamesh’s journey is

an otherworldly or shamanic one, inasmuch as a shaman is a special human being capable of crossing the boundary between this world and the beyond and coming back intact.²⁸ Even though shamanism in the strict sense of the word is a specific religious practice belonging to the cultures of Siberia and Central Asia,²⁹ the religious phenomenon that it represents has wider implications. Shamanism entails ecstatic states and the experience of a world beyond the senses on the part of a special human being with special technical-spiritual skills.³⁰

In the scholarship on the ancient Near East, the term shamanism and the religious phenomena implied by it have been invoked to good effect in the study of the visual arts and ritual world of prehistory, the Neolithic (ca. 10,000–5000 BCE) and Chalcolithic (ca. 5000–4000 BCE) cultures of western Asia.³¹ Burchard Brentjes, for instance, has drawn attention to how elements of shamanism may underlie the religion, texts, and visual arts of the historical periods of the ancient Near East and Egypt as well, detectable in the way in which gods, supernatural beings, and priests with masks are shown incorporating body parts or aspects of animals.³² Ways of understanding the art of the Neolithic sites in Anatolia, such as Göbekli Tepe and Çatal Höyük, are currently among the top priorities of scholars of the archaeology of the Neolithic.³³ Some of these scholars see indicators of shamanic perspectives and practices in the visual record of the Neolithic.³⁴ Klaus Schmidt, the late excavator of Göbekli Tepe, for instance, suggested that there was continuity from the shamans of Neolithic society, who would have been the chief players in the steering of a by and large egalitarian society, to the scholar-priests of “early high civilization,” such as the Late Uruk period (ca. 3500–3100 BCE), in the ancient Near East.³⁵

Likewise, a number of essays published in a volume edited by Margaret Cool Root, *This Fertile Land: Signs and Symbols in the Early Arts of Iran and Iraq*,³⁶ put forward the shaman, defined as a human being with special spiritual forces, and shamanism as central to understanding the imagery on pottery and clay sealings of Chalcolithic Susa (Susa I, ca. 4000 BCE), contemporary with the end of the Ubaid period (ca. 5000–4000 BCE) in ancient Mesopotamia. Throughout *This Fertile Land*, the word shaman is treated as a well-established, almost household, term in reference both to the animal-headed human figures of the Susa sealings and the religious milieu represented by the imagery of this prehistoric artistic tradition. In an essay in this volume, Andrew Wilburn, echoing Schmidt, proposes that the ibex-headed man of the Susa sealings prefigured the “priest king” of the Uruk period. As “the shaman drops out of the imagery of Iran and Iraq after late prehistory, ... his roles may indeed have been subsumed by leaders who increasingly took on more institutionalized positions of power in cultic as well as secular affairs.”³⁷

A similar perspective and conclusions characterize the 2005 work of Petr Charvát titled *The Iconography of Pristine Statehood: Painted Pottery and Seal Impressions from Susa, Southwestern Iran*,³⁸ published in the same year as Root's volume. Charvát does not use the word shaman in his text, referring instead to "[s]pecialists in things spiritual, those who walk with gods, eat and sleep with gods and, if necessary, devise gods," who "have left us an eloquent testimony of their labours in the symbols ornating" prehistoric pottery, especially that of the Halaf and Susa cultures in Mesopotamia and Iran, respectively.³⁹ In the present study, I sustain the use of the terms shaman and shamanism as concepts and tools that help reach a better understanding of the visual language of the ancient Near East in reference to metaphysical phenomena, particularly experiencing the beyond. My use of the terms shaman and shamanism is in keeping with their "looser" understanding in recent archaeological inquiry, which does not confine the discussion to the religions of Central Asian and Siberian cultures.⁴⁰

The visual arts of the historical periods of the ancient Near East should be seen as having preserved elements of the artistic visions and practices characterizing the prehistory of this area. Thus, a shamanic perspective in approaching the key emblematic images of the courts of the ancient Near East would be crucial for the current state of the field. In this respect, scholars of the art and archaeology of the historical periods of the ancient Near East would have much to learn from their colleagues specializing in the Neolithic cultures of the same geographic area or those of the historical periods, who have also started looking at prehistory through that lens.

A special human being who is capable of making otherworldly journeys and returning successfully must be thought of as not having an ordinary post-mortem state. Implications of a destiny beyond death are an integral component of his ontology. As lord over the dead in the netherworld and a minor god rendering judgment after he dies, Gilgamesh is destined for a higher post-mortem rank than the usual gloomy lot assigned to the ordinary deceased in ancient Mesopotamia.⁴¹ In a culture in certain eras of which kings were deified and ascended to heaven after death, such as the Ur III (ca. 2112–2004 BCE) and Isin (ca. 2017–1793 BCE) periods,⁴² it is reductive to confine conceptions of immortalization to Gilgamesh's, Etana's, or Adapa's "failure" to find immortality in the flesh. Spiritual and post-mortem conceptions of immortalization, such as the Egyptian and Hittite kings' becoming gods after death, should also be taken into consideration in tracing the "immortality belief" in the art and thought of the wider ancient Near East. In this respect, contrary to what Moortgat thought, Gilgamesh is a paradigm for immortalization as well.

Surely, elements of pathos exist in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* starting with its Old Babylonian version, in the form of the explicit fear of death Gilgamesh experiences, his sorrows, and his frustrations. The artists of the Neo-Assyrian

king Ashurbanipal added an almost theatrical element of pathos to the lion hunt reliefs in the North Palace at Nineveh, while the royal lion hunt from a two-wheeled lightweight chariot as pure paradigm had already existed in the Near East, attested in the reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud before Ashurbanipal, and earlier in the art of New Kingdom Egypt (ca. 1550–1070 BCE).⁴³ Likewise, the elements of pathos in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* should not detract from the presence and validity in the relevant poems of the basic religious principle centered on a special human being's breaking away from the limitations of physical existence and experiencing the beyond while still alive.

Both Adapa and Etana also acquire this experience while alive, through ascending to heaven, even though they, too, return “empty handed” from their journeys as far as the attainment of eternal life goes.⁴⁴ Adapa is summoned to heaven after damaging the wing of the South Wind, and there he is offered the food of life, or immortality. Following the instructions of his master Enki/Ea, he refuses to partake of the food offered him by the sky god Anu. Etana also goes up to the sky on the back of an eagle in search for a plant of life, but returns without obtaining it. Gilgamesh, Adapa, and Etana all return, but once, closing one single episode, rather than defining recurrent cycles like Tammuz. Their “failure” to obtain or partake of the plant or food of eternal life, because the gods “withhold it from humanity,” is not an obstacle to their following and delineating the pathway to it and reaching a level or manifestation of the beyond, be it terrestrial or celestial, during their lifetimes.⁴⁵ Their ontology can by no means be thought of as unaffected by this experience, regardless of the lack of a concrete or physical attainment of immortality. In the end they return invested with enhanced spiritual powers. Thus, in addition to the primeval phenomenon of the Flood Hero and his being placed apart from humanity as an immortal, one should be aware of other modes of immortality and immortalization in ancient Mesopotamia.

One could conceive of a twofold metaphysics of experiencing the beyond in the ancient Near East, generalizable to a wider ancient and traditional sphere as well, one “shamanic,” the other “mystical,” both terms used here in their simplest sense. In the former, shamanic, the experience is concrete and physical. It is obtained on this side of time by means of a journey to the beyond induced by ecstatic techniques.⁴⁶ The latter, mystical, pertains to spiritual states or the experience of the divine through mental, emotional, or intellectual faculties, constituting a process of liberating the individual from the bonds of time and death. Its stages may be experienced while alive, as though after death, leading ultimately to a form of deification or apotheosis, a union with the divine, realized on this side of time, just as it is fulfilled in the beyond after death. As such, shamanic and mystical are closely related; the former is in certain ways the concrete model for the latter. The steps a shaman takes on his journey out

of this world may be thought to have their counterparts in the spiritual process of individual liberation from death and from all additional contingency of being.⁴⁷ Thus, Moortgat's "immortality belief" can be furthered through this twofold formulation of immortalization, argued here to underlie the most emblematic statements of the royal-sponsored artistic traditions of the ancient Near East.

A SUPRA-TEXTUAL LANGUAGE

With their constant proclamation of notions and processes of immortalization through the figure of the king, the formulaic art of the ancient Near East must be thought to have its own authentic and autonomous sources and language of communication, irrespective of textual parallelisms, as Moortgat showed more than half a century ago. Other scholars of the ancient Near East whose work acknowledged conceptions of immortality and paradise in the art and thought of ancient Mesopotamia include William Albright (1919) and Geo Widengren (1951).⁴⁸ In the last phases of his career in the late 1930s and 1940s, the great art historian of India, Ananda Coomaraswamy, probed the same themes in the art of the ancient Near East, particularly the plant and water of life, or immortality, as well as the symbolism of the sun, around the time when the study of ancient Near Eastern art was in its incipient stages. He cited extensively the work of Douglas Van Buren and Frankfort.⁴⁹

It is within the continuum of interculturalism and eventually imperialism characterizing the Middle Bronze, Late Bronze, and Iron Age that we find ideologies of universal rule expressed in art, enhancing and proliferating those age-old notions of regeneration and immortalization already embedded in the visual language of the ancient Near East from the late fourth millennium BCE onward. The art of the states of these periods, ranging from Old Babylonian Mari across the Late Bronze Age empires of Syro-Mesopotamia and Anatolia to the Neo-Assyrian art of the Iron Age clearly carried Moortgat's *Unsterblichkeitsglaube* on to a wider frame of temporality, history, and universality commensurate with the complexity of their political ideologies and ties, as well as the richness of their iconographic repertoires.

Ultimately, however, the resulting visual languages are supra-political and sacral, even though their production is enabled by mechanisms of political control. Furthermore, these visual languages are supra-textual, even though the notions they address find resonance in contemporary corpora of texts. Finally, these languages are unanimous in the kinds of concepts, processes, and phenomena that they communicate, even though each naturally takes on the specific guise and form of the artistic tradition in which it was developed. Such unanimity does not necessarily amount to a universality of concepts expressed in art. There were deep-seated levels of familiarity among the courts of the

greater ancient Near East with one another's intellectual traditions and ideas. The visual realm was particularly suitable for the dissemination and sharing of such ideas, regardless of whether or not we are able to pinpoint their original sources and routes of dissemination. Such sharing and dissemination were not so much the result of trade and circulation of materials and goods, as they were of conscious and systematic communication directly among centers, in ways that are not always detectable in the historical record.⁵⁰

The "international" style that emerged in the leading states of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East in the Late Bronze Age is the best manifestation of this shared artistic language.⁵¹ Its visual vocabulary encompasses precisely those timeless and formulaic designs such as stylized plants, heraldic compositions incorporating mythological beings, and scenes of the hunt and combat, all visual hallmarks of Moortgat's "immortality belief." This style can be considered as a systematized coordination of all those timeless elements of the *Unsterblichkeitsglaube* not only figurally but also stylistically. Such a style would not have come about had there not already existed the shared foundation among the great artistic traditions of the Near East for concepts centered on renewal, immortalization, and the defeat of evil and death, the matter of art in the ancient Near East from time immemorial.

CONCEPTUAL BASES

In laying out the conceptual bases of the present study, I should like to identify some of the current tenets in historical inquiry and approaching material culture, which, when required rigidly from the kind of visual analysis conducted here, prove damaging, rather than constructive, for this activity to come to proper fruition. In archaeological and other historical inquiry centered on the ancient world nowadays, we encounter all too often statements that everything can be understood only in its own context, that it is the context that will tell us what something is, and that it is only on a case-by-case basis that phenomena can be understood. Surely, context has indispensable uses in many aspects of archaeological inquiry. However, there equally are many instances in which physical and socio-political contexts are inadequate to account for all aspects of meaning in the visual arts. On the one hand, the use of the term context has grown extremely flexible, enabling most approaches to take into consideration so many matters purportedly crucial to the thing focused on. On the other hand, context may easily become a rigid and restrictive tool, because the obligation to "contextualize" could result in one's missing the key internal qualities of the thing focused on not necessarily always explicable by everything remotely relevant around and outside it.

Current trends also often deal with works of art from the ancient Near East mainly as expressions of the specific political agendas and national or ethnic

identities of the states or communities that produced them. As such, each state has a unique identity, not to be confused or conflated with others. Closely related to this view is also the perception that ancient Mesopotamia is not a monolithic civilization, that there are a multitude of periods and cultures within its geographic and chronological range, and that these periods and cultures should be understood discretely. In such a milieu, cross-cultural comparison is a drastic activity; it has to be accompanied with elaborate apologies and justifications. There are two primary acceptable tracks. The first is the demonstration of historical contact between the different cultures compared. The second is a case made for similar geographic, environmental, or socio-political circumstances that may have generated similar perspectives in the cultures compared. Both are valid rationales behind comparative inquiry, but they do not exhaust the bases on which cross-cultural comparison can be carried out.⁵²

The major civilizations of the greater Near East throughout antiquity, ranging from the Aegean to the Indus Valley, were deeply familiar with one another's intellectual traditions and shared common mindsets and idioms. The interconnections among them, which increased tremendously during the great intercultural eras, such as the Middle and Late Bronze Age, only reinforced and enriched these already existing parallels.⁵³ Far from being an extravagant activity that needs an overload of defense, a comparative vantage point is essential to any serious study of the fundamentals embedded in the visual arts and intellectual thought of the greater ancient Near East. In fact, not one individual manifestation of these matters may be understood properly and thoroughly without recourse to and confirmation from its other manifestations in other integral traditions.

In his work, Coomaraswamy, for instance, constantly provided comparative material and cross-references from sources in Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit to illustrate the concepts that he dealt with, not because his focus was Indo-European linguistics or matters of historical transmission among ancient Greece, the Roman Empire, and medieval India (not that such transmission was not the case).⁵⁴ Likewise, in his article on the "Mouth of the Rivers," Albright drew on ancient Egyptian culture to illustrate some of his points regarding aspects of ancient Mesopotamian intellectual thought. It is this sense of a deeper tradition permeating aspects of the cultures of the Mediterranean and the greater Afro-Asiatic Near East that we have come to lose and ignore in current historical inquiry.

Indeed, like Moortgat's and Frankfort's studies, Coomaraswamy's work as well may offer the contemporary scholar of the art of the ancient Near East the opportunity to reconcile metaphysics with historical inquiry. In his work, Coomaraswamy certainly made the assumption that common sources of traditional wisdom had informed multiple historical cultures of the ancient and medieval Old World. However, it would be inappropriate to view

Coomaraswamy as a universalist; he is rather a traditionist or traditionalist, a perspective to which I am deeply sympathetic in my approach to the art of the ancient Near East. Coomaraswamy's work is fully grounded in specific textual and visual evidence, with extensive scholarly documentation. The kind of philosophical engagement that permeates his iconographic essays has to this day not been properly applied to the study of the art of the ancient Near East in explicating its key figural and ornamental themes.⁵⁵ As a scholar of India, Coomaraswamy's interest in the art of the ancient Near East also bodes well, albeit belatedly, for a much closer interaction between the study of South Asian art and that of ancient Western Asia. Efforts to that end have already been initiated by Irene Winter in some of her studies,⁵⁶ but more is needed for such an endeavor to materialize, particularly at the level of iconography.

To sum up, there are timeless and ahistorical elements in the visual language of the art of ancient Mesopotamia and adjacent areas that cannot be understood and appreciated in a rigidly compartmentalized, case-by-case, and "contextual" basis. These elements constitute the metaphysics of the art of the ancient Near East, and should be studied by methods that are commensurate with the nature and qualities of a visual language that in essence is sacral; through carefully articulated comparison and cross-reference both horizontally (synchronically) across geographies and vertically (diachronically) across chronologies. It would be an error to confuse such a perspective with a lack of historical context and a denial of the individuality of cultures, periods, and their distinctive and unique characteristics. In fact, in the domain of the visual arts in the ancient Near East, proper contexts always lie within the minds of the creators of the art and the traditions in which they operate, a notion of context that goes beyond matters of "physical neighborhood."⁵⁷ Master artists and their traditions were certainly not outlets of personal expression and creativity in the ancient Near East; their programmatic parameters ranged beyond the local and the idiosyncratic, overlapping in harmony with those of a wider world. The presence of contrasts or differences among these cultures makes the comparative activity richer and more valuable. It would be pointless to compare two nearly identical things; and yet, one compares for sameness, not for divergence.⁵⁸

In the last two decades, there has been a movement in Art History, whereby the limitations of a deterministically "contextual" approach to the visual arts have been acknowledged. Art as a phenomenon has been understood to have a dimension that transcends particular socio-political contexts, an ahistorical element that has been dubbed "anachronic."⁵⁹ Through this anachronic quality or potential, works of art may offer channels of communication with one another and audiences across cultures and periods, and such channels may not always be accounted for within rigidly defined historical contexts. In fact, strictly imposed contexts might cause serious attrition in this rich communicative

aspect and power of images. Such a perspective of the anachronic is encouraging and useful both for understanding art within the ancient Near East and its relevance to a wider world of traditional art.

It seems that the mode in which scholars such as Moortgat, Frankfort, and Ekrem Akurgal studied the art of the ancient Near East around the mid-twentieth century had already taken into consideration this anachronic dimension within the broader range of the relevant cultures, without naming it as such.⁶⁰ In the present study, rather than engaging specifically with this theoretically charged discourse in the field of art history, I should like to acknowledge its value, but return, perhaps in a much more pedestrian way, to a vantage point that had already existed in the incipient stages of ancient Near Eastern art history, especially the works of Douglas Van Buren, Frankfort, and Moortgat. As such, I adopt a perspective that brings to the fore the phenomenon of tradition, the threads of unbroken continuity in concepts and visual paradigms throughout eras and across cultures already sharing perspectives and mentalities. Even though at a mechanical level, these concepts are timeless on account of their longevity; at an etiological level, it is their inherent timelessness that generated their longevity in the first place.

EGYPT AND MESOPOTAMIA

Beyond the interconnectedness among cultures stationed in Anatolia, Syria, and Mesopotamia in western Asian antiquity, the culture of Egypt was an inexhaustible repository that supplied ideas and motifs to the artistic traditions of the Near East. In many ways, ancient Egypt can be thought of as a cousin culture of ancient Mesopotamia, again a view that should not be contingent upon historically attested instances of contact between the two civilizations, the earliest of which during the second half of the fourth millennium BCE is still not well understood.⁶¹

Egyptian representational traditions are particularly rich in the expression of renewal, immortalization, and ascent. They can offer insight for a better understanding of similar notions that may not always be as clearly conveyed in ancient western Asian artistic traditions as they are in the highly elaborate, voluminous, and more literal visual output of ancient Egypt. Thus, throughout this study, regardless of matters of historical contact or influence, I see ancient Egyptian art and thought as important iconographic and intellectual sources that provide enriched perspectives in the analysis and interpretation of ancient Western Asian art.

CONCEPTIONS OF SACRAL TIME AND ESCHATOLOGY

What Moortgat referred to as the “immortality belief,” or the “Tammuz belief,” has a recurrent or cyclical dimension by virtue of Tammuz’s being a returning

god who is revived every spring.⁶² Cyclical and constant renewal is also clear in the regular celebration of the ancient Mesopotamian spring rite, referred to as the *akitu* in Akkadian in the later periods. In his introduction to an analysis of the Luxor Temple and the *opet* festival, an Egyptian ritual of royal renewal and consolidation of divine kingship that took place in and around this temple during the New Kingdom, Lanny Bell juxtaposes two conceptions of time in ancient Egypt. The first is profane time, characterized by the human life span marked by birth, puberty, aging, and death; a notion of time that is linear and concrete, belonging purely to the ordinary human affairs.⁶³ The second is sacred time, a notion defined by the “redemptive” quality of a cyclical sense of temporality and regeneration that “permits escape from the constraints of secular time’s relentless forward flow.”⁶⁴

Scholars of the ancient Near East, too, have seen two distinct but interconnected modes of temporality in ancient Mesopotamian thought, one historical or chronological, characterized by a linear configuration, and the other mythical or ritual, characterized by cyclicity and renewal.⁶⁵ The interplay between the two results in a consciousness of the future embedded in the past. The uses and representation of this past are seen particularly in the ancient Mesopotamian commemorative monument, which records a past or historical event or transaction “forever” for a future audience, real and imagined, through the combined media of text and image.⁶⁶

By fruitfully stepping into an endless source of cyclical regeneration, an individual may escape the limitations of profane time and experience an inexhaustible source of life in the beyond, exemplified in ancient Egypt by the solar movement through the sky and the netherworld. As we have seen, even though the typical mode in which this experience is attained is after death, it can also be achieved by a special human being while still alive, without the elimination of the biological reality and threshold of death. The presence of such a conception of sacral temporality, time beyond or outside time, could not be confined to ancient Egypt. It characterizes other major traditions of thought in western Asian antiquity as well. It is no wonder that a quintessentially Egyptian symbol of solar movement, the winged disk, spread from Egypt to Syria, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and eventually to Iran, representing in all these visual traditions a divinity of supreme and regal power, and possibly a mode of eternity associated with him, from the Middle Bronze Age on.⁶⁷ Efforts to understand this symbol continue to this day.⁶⁸

It is conceptions of sacred time and eternity that the present study proposes to bring to a historical analysis of the art of the ancient Near East; to be added to those of renewal and immortalization emphasized so succinctly by Moortgat more than half a century ago. Referred to throughout this essay as “sacral time,” it is this mode of time that harbors processes of immortalization. Sacral time is temporality within the cosmos but outside the boundaries of

profane time. Thus, in the various parts of this book, I also refer to it as “time outside time.” In discussions of sacral time, in addition to matters of immortalization at the individual level, one should also take into consideration matters of history, particularly the larger history of the cosmos, to which I refer here as “universal history,” “sacral history,” or “macro history.” Political or military history, the way it was recorded in text and image by certain cultures of the ancient Near East, should be seen as embedded in this macro, and sacral, conception of history.⁶⁹ Indeed, such a conception of sacral time can be drawn from the sources both in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia.

In both cultures, certain king lists contained a sense of time and history that presented individual kings and their reigns within a continuum that extended back to a primeval era populated with divine and super-human kings.⁷⁰ The *Sumerian King List* presents the Flood as the major cosmic cataclysm that separates an antediluvian era from a postdiluvian one. Because of the unique exemplar of a human being rendered immortal in ancient Mesopotamian narratives of the Flood, questions of immortalization and primeval history are strongly linked; both are aspects of sacral time. In ancient Greece, this connection can be seen in Hesiod’s fourth generation of men, the heroes of the Theban and Trojan cycles, some of whom were rendered immortal and placed apart on the Isles of the Blessed.⁷¹

Just as time outside time is the source and venue of immortality, so does it govern the temporal journey of the cosmos inasmuch as the world order is subject to periodic destruction and renewal. In the greater ancient Near East, at the micro level, it was as though each king enabled a renewed and pristine world order, in certain cases without hesitating to depict eras before himself as those of chaos and evil.⁷² In Greek and Indic conceptions of macro history, each era or generation ends with destruction leading to a renewed world order, albeit in a pattern characterized by gradual decline, clearest in the Indic system.⁷³ In addition to cataclysms such as the Flood, warfare, too, is crucial in marking the changes from one era to another, as seen in the *Sumerian King List*, which formulates the end of each post-diluvian city’s kingship as its being “smitten by weapons.”⁷⁴ In the ancient Greek tradition, the wars centered on the cities of Thebes and Troy mark the transition between the fourth age of men and Hesiod’s native age of iron. The persistent focus on military history in the relief depictions of Ramesside Egypt (ca. 1295–1069 BCE) and the Assyrian Empire, across the threshold that marks *our* archaeological ages of Bronze and Iron, cannot be dissociated from the role of warfare as cosmic cataclysm in ancient Near Eastern myths and accounts of primeval history.⁷⁵

The most essential step I take in this study is to probe in the visual arts possible conceptions of ultimate exit from all temporality, including the macro temporality of the wider cosmos, both at the level of the individual and at the level of history. Discussions of sacral time, eternity, and macro history inevitably

lead to questions of eschatology, which is often perceived *a priori* by many as a Judeo-Christian phenomenon. Invoking notions of eschatology in the study of the ancient Near East may easily be perceived as an anachronistic modern perspective. One wonders, however, if the segregation, if not the vacuum, in which ancient Mesopotamia has been approached by contemporary scholarship is more of a modern construct than the option of opening up its study to matters of genuine continuity and parallelism in the history of ideas in the Near East and the Mediterranean at least across the eras of antiquity.⁷⁶ There is the fear, no doubt generated by some of the motives behind the initial exploration of the ancient Mesopotamian civilization, which had a biblical focus,⁷⁷ of “Christianizing” the ancient Near East. Even though caution in this regard is justified, when turned into a vocation or dogma, it might cause more harm to the scholarly fields that focus on ancient Mesopotamia than preserve their credibility. In the end, as laid out in what follows, there is enough ground in the ancient Near Eastern cultures themselves for discussions of eschatology and the apocalyptic to take place in their study, and such perspectives have already been explored in scholarship. It is in this spirit that I propose to take seriously questions of eschatology and the apocalyptic as possibly expressed in the visual arts of the ancient Near East.

DEFINING APOCALYPTIC

In his study on the apocalyptic movement, Walter Schmithals singles out two lines of “radically revolutionary” or “anarchistic” movement in the history of religion, Gnosticism and Apocalypticism. He identifies the former as one focused on the individual liberation or salvation of man and the latter as a universal transformation; both, however, when complete, aimed at an ideal and unchanging state outside the course of this world and its history. Schmithals conceives of the gnostic path as the vertical and the apocalyptic as the horizontal. Even though the former is non-historical and individual by nature and the latter historical and universal, they both reject “continuing cyclical recurrence”; “the circle will run its course only once.”⁷⁸ Both movements in religion have obscure roots. Links with cultures of the ancient Near East, especially Babylonia and Iran, have been proposed and have to this day remained open questions.⁷⁹ In this study, it is with both of these tracks, the vertical and the horizontal, that I engage in relation to certain key regal images from the art of the ancient Near East, with emphasis, however, on their macro-cosmic or universal-historical implications, and hence apocalyptic.

Defining apocalyptic has always been a complex and difficult matter in scholarship. In a study focused on the visual arts, it would not be feasible to rehearse all the views and problems of definition pertaining to the apocalyptic and intervene in the relevant religious historical debates. However, some basic

explanations of terminology are needed for the sake of clarity and simplicity in carrying out the present analysis.⁸⁰ Firstly, the difference between the terms eschatology and apocalyptic is useful to note. While eschatology refers more broadly to knowledge about the end of things or end-time incidents in macro history, apocalyptic has the more distinctive sense of a channel of communication of a revelatory or otherworldly nature imparting knowledge of a future transfigured world order.⁸¹ This is the sense of the term apocalyptic I use throughout my essay. Eschatology is an integral aspect of the apocalyptic, and the designation apocalyptic eschatology covers all grounds as far as the final and permanent renewal of a world order at the end of historical time is concerned.

By virtue of the nature of the images I consider, however, concepts of final judgment and resurrection, which often go together with the transfiguration of the world in Jewish and Christian apocalypses, are not part of my intellectual agenda. Some discussion of judgment in the ancient Near East, nevertheless, has its place in my framework inasmuch as judgment in both ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt are connected with a religious notion of truth and cosmic balance, with implications of death and the beyond. After all, the ring and rod of ancient Mesopotamian visual imagery may be connected with justice, judgment, measure, and balance, both in relation to notions of ideal architecture and an ideal social or world order in harmony with the divine. I have also mentioned above Root's ingenious reading of the Persepolis tribute scenes as processions for judgment before a universal king coextensive with Osiris as the judge over the dead. Such a vantage point shows that conceptions of judgment in the afterlife expressed through royal imagery could equally be at home in western Asian traditions as they are in ancient Egypt. Secondly, in this study, I prefer the adjectival, or predicative, form of the term, apocalyptic, to apocalypticism and apocalypse. Apocalypticism refers to a movement of thought, and apocalypse to a textual genre.⁸² Again, by virtue of the nature of the images I consider, I find the predicative "apocalyptic," to be the simplest and most neutral version of this term in relation to possible visual expressions of permanent renewals of kingship and the cosmic order.

The implications of the apocalyptic are twofold. On the one hand, it refers to a vision or experience of the beyond on the part of a human being, often in relation to an event that lies in the future,⁸³ in closer association with the etymological derivation of the word from the Greek *apokalupto*, to reveal, and hence the word "revelation," the synonym of "apocalypse."⁸⁴ The assignment of the name to a particular kind of literature seems to be of Christian origin, as documented at the beginning of the second century CE in the Revelation of John.⁸⁵

Inasmuch as the apocalyptic "assumes an unseen world" that "affects and determines the visible world" and entails knowledge acquired "through

visions, auditions, and visits to normally inaccessible places like heaven, hell, and remote parts of the earth,” the seer of the apocalyptic has an affinity to the shaman, who also has a concrete experience of the beyond in the form of visits and access to locales ordinarily inaccessible.⁸⁶ On the other hand, the apocalyptic addresses a historical review in tandem with the philosophical notion of an end to all time, profane and sacral, and the powers connected with it, with a resultant incorruptible cosmos and its timeless eternity.⁸⁷ My focus in this study is on this latter facet of the apocalyptic in relation to images. However, with emphasis on matters of individual ascent, experience of the divine, and the resultant liberation or apotheosis, I ascribe due relevance to the “visionary” and revelatory facet of the apocalyptic in the visual arts as well.

In popular consciousness, the apocalyptic evokes matters of global catastrophe, “doomsday,” end of the world, and so on; but the core of the apocalyptic rather encompasses notions of a lasting and universal kingdom. The emphasis on kingship and empire in apocalyptic patterns of thought in later Mediterranean and Near Eastern antiquity calls for greater attention to be paid to the regal art of ancient Mesopotamia and adjacent areas in its potential to express the relevant notions.

OUT OF TIME, OUT OF HISTORY

Ideas of “escaping” or “exiting” history as attested in traditional societies, particularly ancient India, are in the forefront of Mircea Eliade’s classic work *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1954).⁸⁸ Arguing that “archaic” societies, including the ancient cultures of Asia, Europe, and America, did not value history in the modern sense of the endeavor to record as accurately as possible series of events, Eliade drew attention to the ritual element in any traditional perception of history and temporality, consisting of a periodic abolishment of history and a sense of the endless return to a pristine beginning, a “golden age.” He designated as the “terror of history” ancient man’s desire to escape the irreversibility of the relentlessly forward-moving secular time, as well as his desire to exit the endless cycles of death and rebirth within an eternal cosmos that itself was susceptible to periodic destruction and renewal.⁸⁹

Albeit presented through an Indic model, Eliade’s emphasis on ritual notions of time and history are of utmost relevance to the study of the ancient Near East as well. Even though not every period and culture of the ancient Near East had an interest in historiography, by and large, we are here dealing with cultures that were embedded in historical traditions. These historical idioms, however, were never divorced from ritual paradigms of sacral time and sacral history, as already pointed out above in relation to king lists and visual depictions of warfare. Like Coomaraswamy, Eliade, too, favored comparatism and an emphasis on common threads of traditional lore across historical cultures and

eras. Again like Coomaraswamy's, his treatment of aspects of Indian religion and philosophy in association with those of the ancient Near East, particularly on the basis of visual and cosmological symbols, such as the "sacred tree" and the flowing vase, has so far not been taken into consideration by scholars of the art of the ancient Near East in approaching key artistic motifs.⁹⁰ In defining the geographic zone in which the motif of a divinity manifested in a tree occurs, Eliade uses the phrase "Indo-Mesopotamo-Egypto-Aegean area,"⁹¹ which is a revealing designation in drawing attention to the cultural interconnectedness of the greater Near East. These aspects of Eliade's work as well as his studies on sacral or ritual time and shamanism make his findings critically relevant to an updated study of the metaphysics of the art of the ancient Near East. Ancient India has preserved one of the most elaborate and pristine metaphysical traditions of human history. Beyond its immediate connections with Iran, India's wider relevance to the world of ideas and intellectual thought in the ancient Old World should first and foremost be sought in the other great river civilizations of the Near East, Egypt and Mesopotamia. In this study, it is my argument that ideologies, both vertical and horizontal, of escaping all time and history existed in the greater ancient Near East. They were primarily esoteric undercurrents present at royal courts, expressed more eloquently, albeit cryptically, in images than in texts.

ARTISTIC PRODUCTION AND "REGAL ART"

Perceptions of immortalization and macro history would have constituted speculations of the highest intellectual order at the courts of the ancient Near East. It may be impossible to trace the identity of the personages who developed, expounded, and guarded these ideas. Such an obstacle, however, should not amount to a dismissal of these individuals' existence and close association with master artists or iconographers of their eras. The identity and background of master artists are among the perennial questions in the study of the art of the ancient Near East. Any attempt to reconstruct artistic production in an ancient culture would entail knowing about the creative process and the world of ideas connected with such artists and expressed in art. Neither aspect of artistic production, however, is readily available in the written record of the ancient Near East. Although we obtain information from the written correspondence and visual record of the Neo-Assyrian court about royal building programs,⁹² production of royal statuary,⁹³ and royal quarrying,⁹⁴ such data are insufficient to illuminate more thoroughly the intellectual agendas and thought processes of master artists or learned supervisors in their codification of the royal iconographic programs of Assyria.

Likewise, the archives of Old Babylonian Mari offer information about artisans and craftsmanship at the court,⁹⁵ but they do not shed light on the

identity, status, and intellectual sources of the creators of the extant figural and ornamental compositions in the medium of painting and sculpture found in the Mari palace. Thus, in the ancient Near East, we find no written record of any correspondence in artistic or iconographic ideas between master artists and contemporary scholars, which does not mean that such correspondence did not exist orally and was not fundamental to the professional practice of both parties. Given that the non-technical or intangible aspects of artistic production in the ancient Near East are difficult to account for by documentary evidence, one needs to look at and analyze the art itself more closely for the appropriate cues in matters of aesthetic and semantic conception.⁹⁶

The highly specialized nature and complexity of the ideas and speculations arguably embedded in the visual arts of ancient Near Eastern royal courts and the smallness of the circles of learned individuals who handled them would inevitably have resulted in their restricted or esoteric nature. Conversely, however, the interconnectedness of multiple court cultures in this region would have ascertained wider familiarity with these notions only at the level of the highest intellectual elites. As such, there was an exclusive tradition across the ages within the ancient Near East that maintained the royal image and imagery connected with kingship as the primary medium or format in which these philosophical ideas were expressed. I designate the corpora of such imagery "regal art." At the most basic level, regal art is royal-sponsored art, found in structures, venues, or on objects produced under royal patronage. At the level of craftsmanship and technique, regal art is of the highest quality of the artistic output of a culture. At the symbolic and intellectual level, regal art is the medium of expression for the timeless concepts of the highest order, the "immortality belief" and all the other notions proposed here to be related to it.

The capacity of regal art to convey the "immortality belief" is not contingent upon whether or not the king of a particular state was officially deified in the particular era in which the art was produced. In fact, outside certain Akkadian (2334–2154 BCE), Ur III, and Isin kings, official royal deification in the form of the use of the divine determinative before the writing of the royal name was not the case in the history of ancient Mesopotamia.⁹⁷ Royal self-representation, however, certainly bordered on or partook of the divine, inevitably making kingship and the figure of the king media of expression in matters of divinization as an ontological category. Indeed, scholars have started pointing out the complexities of the divine nature of the king in the Hittite, Assyrian, and Achaemenid Persian empires, in all of which there was no official deification of the monarch while he was alive, but there is enough evidence that he was treated as divine, especially through imagery.⁹⁸

The knowledge and experience conveyed by regal art belonged more to an intellectual circle than to the king as an individual. This elite's primary

source of knowledge was a study of themselves and their own ontologies.⁹⁹ The possessors of such knowledge and the creators of systems of communication in its expression should themselves be thought of as regal, while certainly not royal in a political sense. It is more likely for members of such circles to have experienced the shamanic and mystical phenomena conveyed by the visual arts than for the king himself as a primarily political and military leader to have undergone them. In other words, even though shamanic leaders of society were likely a reality in the Neolithic, it is difficult to conceive of the kings of most of the historical periods of the ancient Near East as genuinely shamanic. But when matters of the “immortality belief” are depicted in the visual arts, it is the royal figure that ends up being the proxy for the regal personages behind the images, the definitive hallmark of regal art.¹⁰⁰

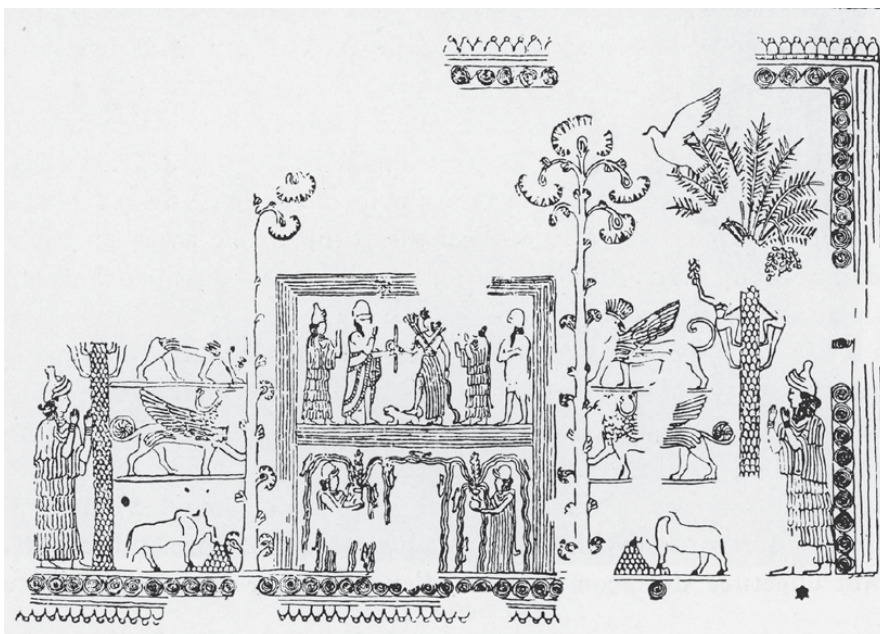
THE ROYAL DESTINY

I should like to introduce one final concept, the “royal destiny.” This is the special post-mortem status of the special human being who is capable of obtaining the experience of the beyond and the divine while alive, mentioned above in relation to figures such as Gilgamesh. The royal destiny is again the lot of the human being with special spiritual, shamanic, or intellectual skills, not necessarily that of the human being who is the holder of the royal office in a particular reign during a particular era. But the royal destiny is again always cast in the guise of the special status, immortalization or ascent, of historical kings and mythical figures of royal identity as described in the written sources and expressed in images.¹⁰¹

Indeed, the concept of the “royal destiny” is not alien to the study of ancient Mesopotamian kingship. In his study on the god Ninurta in the royal ideology of ancient Mesopotamia, Amar Annus drew attention to how rulership in Sumer during the third millennium BCE was warranted by the ritual of the determination of the royal fate.¹⁰² Our chief evidence in this regard comes from the royal hymns of the Ur III and Isin periods, which record the fixing of the royal destiny within the context of “investiture.” Annus notes that the ritual in essence may have been a “sacred mystery,” with the formula of the “determination of royal fate” expressed either through the bestowal of “eternal kingship” on the king or “by extending the years of [his] reign.”¹⁰³ Both tropes resonate with the themes of sacral time and eternity dealt with extensively in this study. Here, however, I add a further speculative dimension to the notion of destiny found in the ancient Mesopotamian royal lore, and address a destiny in its potential relevance to the beyond and the status it offers the regal deceased.

ART AND THE APOCALYPTIC

Discussions of the apocalyptic and its sources in the ancient Near East, particularly Mesopotamia, by now have a long scholarly history, with an increased interest and focus in the recent decades.¹⁰⁴ However, there has been little attention devoted to the art of the ancient Near East from this vantage point. It is noteworthy that both in the Book of Ezekiel (40.3) and the Revelation of John (21.15), the messenger of the eschatological temple and the city, respectively, holds measuring instruments in his hand; a linen cord and measuring reed in the former text, and a measuring rod of gold in the latter. In both cases, the instruments are for measuring the dimensions of the structure and the city, respectively. The description of the temple in the Book of Ezekiel (40–41), with its cherubim, palm trees, recesses, and stairs leading to a gateway, is certainly reminiscent of the Mari painting in its figural and compositional aspects (Figs. 2, 5, and 7). In his *Babylon and the Old Testament*,¹⁰⁵ André Parrot, the initial excavator of Mari and the “investiture” painting, acknowledged the relevance of aspects of the imagery of Ezekiel’s vision (10.9) to the art of the ancient Near East, although, surprisingly, without reference to the Mari painting, concentrating instead on the Assyrian *Mischwesen* that bring together human, bovine, and leonine body parts. Parrot did note, however, the parallel between the ancient Mesopotamian ring and rod and the measuring instruments mentioned in the Book of Ezekiel.¹⁰⁶



5. Drawing of the “investiture” painting. From Parrot, *Peintures murales*, Fig. 48. Courtesy Mission archéologique française de Mari, fonds Parrot.

Even more surprising is Parrot's lack of engagement with the Mari painting in a more focused study on art and the roots of the apocalyptic in the ancient Near East, "Glyptique de Mari et mythologie orientale: Les origines lointaines du symbolisme évangélique," in *Studia Mariana*, 111–26, which volume has as its frontispiece a reproduction of the painting. Here, Parrot even duly notes the possible connection between the Neo-Assyrian glazed brick panels from Khorsabad featuring the lion, bull, and man, known as the Assyrian "astrologypths,"¹⁰⁷ and the Ezekiel imagery, but provides no discussion of the Mari painting, even though Barrelet refers to the same Khorsabad images in relation to the "investiture" painting in her own essay in the same volume, as revisited in the [next chapter](#).

The significance and implications of the lion, bull, eagle, and human imagery in formulaic representations of ancient Near Eastern art ranging from the third through the first millennia BCE, including the Mari painting and the Assyrian "astroglyhs," deserve further and more thorough scrutiny based on Parrot's ingenious observations on "art and apocalyptic" in the ancient Near East. More immediately needed, however, is a simultaneously wider and much more basic framework within which to lay the foundations for discussing and researching the topic "art and apocalyptic." These fundamentals encompass conceptions of sacral time, history, the terrestrial and the celestial, modes of immortalization, the ideal temple and the sacred city, and sacral kingship. It is the objective of this study to trace these matters within a by and large Mesopotamia-centered visual record. To that end, in what follows, I address a reasonably comprehensive body of ancient Mesopotamian figural and ornamental themes and works of art ranging from the third to the first millennia BCE, and carry out supplementary discussions of other integral visual traditions, particularly Egyptian and Anatolian, from the same angle.

In his long and turbulent adventure of painting the Sistine Chapel ceiling, Michelangelo began his commission by painting the biblical Flood.¹⁰⁸ The scene is by no means located in any distinctive position of the vault that would lend itself to being a starting point, such as the ends or the exact center; it corresponds to the second set of windows from the entrance of the chapel.¹⁰⁹ The scene is not chronologically the oldest of the episodes from the Old Testament painted on the ceiling either. In fact, it is near the end of the sequence of early cosmic and human history, such as creation, temptation, and expulsion, depicted in the compositions. Within the broader apocalyptic vision presented by the Sistine Chapel ceiling, however, Michelangelo must have been conscious of the crucial and foundational place of the Flood to have made the decision to start his activity there.¹¹⁰

In addition to many other episodes from and emphasis on the Old Testament, the ceiling features the sibyls of Mediterranean antiquity, extending from the Italian peninsula to Babylonia, not to mention the figure of Daniel, revealing its wide-ranging apocalyptic perspective, with roots reaching back to the ancient Near East through the mediation of “the great era of Greco-Roman and Hebraic antiquity.”¹¹¹ Even though Michelangelo’s intellectual agenda for the Sistine Chapel ceiling is by and large inspired by Christian theology, with its original interpretations of the Old Testament stories and concepts and prominent inclusion of the sibyls, there is a dimension here that takes the compositions on to a wider arena of universal history transcending strictly Christological parameters.

Andrew Graham-Dixon understands the Sistine Chapel ceiling frescoes as a window to the mind of the artist whom he sees as a theologian in his own right, stressing the original and unorthodox nature of the depictions, “going beyond the straightforward expression of Christian doctrine.”¹¹² His perspective of Michelangelo’s artistic license in relation to scholarly advisors is parallel to my view of the ancient Mesopotamian artist presented in this study, particularly the exemplar of the creator of the Mari painting, as a sage in his own right, always to be considered, nevertheless, against the intellectual backdrop of his contemporary court culture: “So while it is reasonable to assume that Michelangelo discussed his ideas with people whose opinions he respected, it is highly unlikely that he allowed himself to be enslaved by any single, rigid theological framework.”¹¹³

If one were commissioned to reproduce all the major regal images that survived from the ancient Near East within a unified diagrammatic composition reminiscent of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, one might as well start with the “investiture” painting. One would certainly not place it at the absolute center of the composition, and it certainly would not have been the oldest. But the chronological juncture and semantic crux it represents would have warranted its principal execution. This book does not propose to repaint the Sistine Chapel ceiling with images from the ancient Near East. But it does propose the presence in this age-old artistic tradition of an apocalyptic vision or perspective *like* the one embedded in that famous series of frescoes.

ONE

THE "INVESTITURE" PAINTING FROM MARI

The so-called investiture painting from the palace at Mari (Figs. 2 and 5), a site on the Euphrates in what is today Syria (Fig. 6), dates from the eighteenth century BCE, the Old Babylonian period of ancient Mesopotamian culture. Today in the Louvre, it is unique in its state of preservation and richness of imagery within the corpus of extant ancient Mesopotamian works of art in the medium of wall painting. Perhaps no other single work of art surviving from the ancient Near East is broader in visual vocabulary. The painting is further unique in its posing a difficult iconographic problem. There are a significant number of visual elements in the composition familiar from their widespread occurrence in ancient Mesopotamian art. These include the flowing vase, the ring and rod, mythical quadrupeds, the mound rendered with the "mountain scale" pattern, the protective Lama goddess with raised hands, and the goddess Ishtar with her attributes, the lion, the scimitar, and the maces emanating from her shoulders.¹ The unique way in which these figures are brought together and set in relationship with elaborate elements of frame, landscape, and ornament, however, makes the iconography of the painting challenging.² Even though the composition stands alone within its chronological and spatial framework, its imagery resonates with the fundamental figural aspects of many other ancient Mesopotamian monuments. Its almost encyclopedic visual repertoire warrants an interpretive endeavor within the larger framework of the art of the ancient Near East.



6. Map of ancient Mesopotamia. Courtesy The Trustees of the British Museum.

The painting is a symmetrical composition delineated by an interior frieze of running spirals, finished above and below by bands of what seem to be tassels (Figs. 2 and 5).³ The imagery of the scene, particularly its central panel showing the king and the goddess Ishtar (Fig. 7), is primarily embedded in the visual language of Babylonia, to which Mari was closely bound culturally and politically in the early second millennium BCE. Aspects of the larger composition (Figs. 2 and 5), such as the interest in landscape and the natural world, as well as the fondness for abstract patterns in the form of bands and running spirals, evoke the contemporary artistic traditions of Syria, Egypt, and the Aegean.⁴ With the large representations of the protective Lama goddess, a Babylonian figural type going back to the Neo-Sumerian period, that flank the landscape, the composition resumes its hieratic character outside the central panel as well.⁵

The line drawings in Figures 5 and 7 show in clear and neutral fashion what is preserved of the composition. The photograph of the remains of the painting in Figure 2, which is the standard in current academic publications on the art and archaeology of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East, features some restorations only where they are certain or highly likely. In tandem with the line drawings, it is possible to note the restored segments of the painting in the photograph, distinguished also by difference in color and lines of fracture. The two major gaps in the composition are the upper part of the lateral



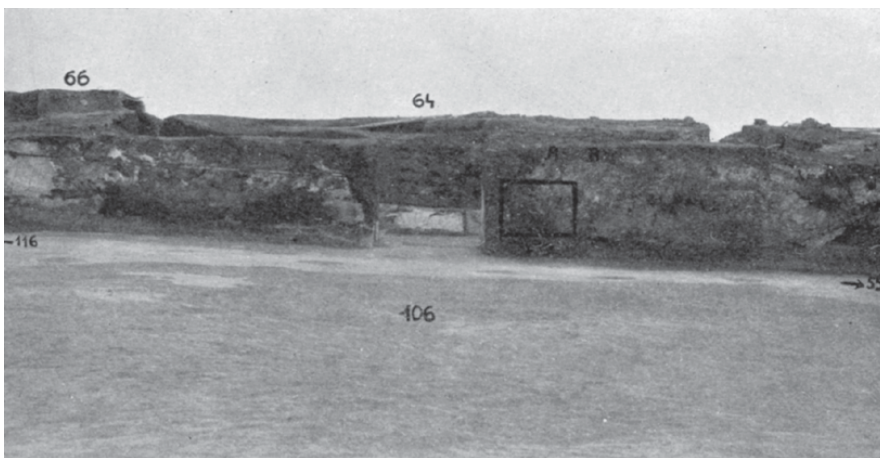
7. Drawing of the central panel of the "investiture" painting from the palace at Mari. From Parrot, *Peintures murales*, pl. XI. Courtesy Mission archéologique française de Mari, fonds Parrot.

panel on the left hand side and a portion of the zone above the central panel. Also missing are the heads of both of the lowermost bovines flanking the centerpiece. In light of the symmetrical configuration dominating the composition, one may make the assumption that the left hand side mirrored the right hand side, perhaps with the exception of the large blue bird, as proposed in the [next chapter](#). It seems unlikely that the missing part of the zone above the central panel featured any figural or other imagery that would have been meaningful within the overall composition of the painting. From the remains of the painting, it is also clear that the outer frame extended horizontally

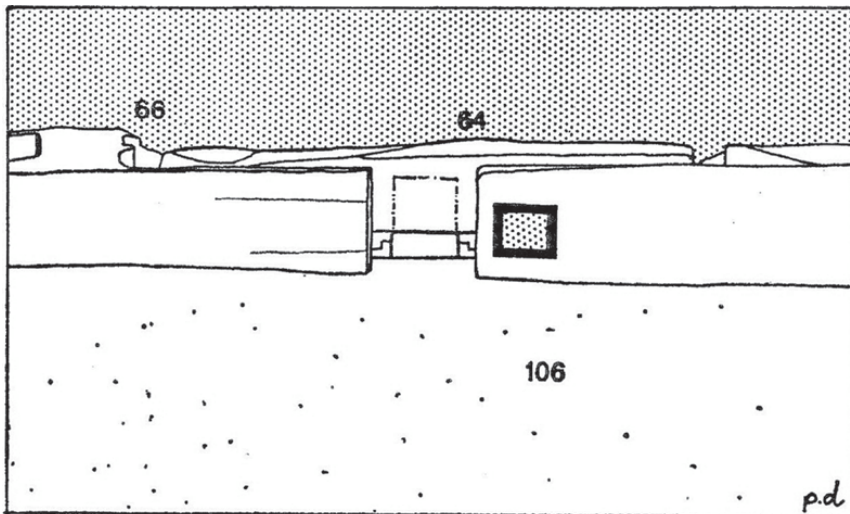
toward the right hand side, suggesting that the composition had imagery adjacent to it, perhaps within a programmatic whole (Fig. 2). Today, in studying the painting, we certainly are at a disadvantage by not knowing what was around it and what the contemporary decorative program of its findspot was like. However, the image is also well rounded enough within its own parameters to justify an iconographic analysis and further contextualization within the artistic traditions of ancient Mesopotamia and adjacent areas.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERY AND ARCHITECTURAL SETTING

The “investiture” painting from Mari was discovered *in situ* by André Parrot during the 1935–36 excavation season on the south wall of Court 106 of the Old Babylonian palace, to the right of the doorway leading into Room 64, the throne room suite (Figs. 8–9). The bottom of the painting was about 35 cm above the ground line. With a width of 2.5 m, and a height of 1.75 m, the composition was at eye level (Figs. 8 and 9).⁶ It was painted above an ornamental plinth directly on a mud plaster coating.⁷ Moortgat dated the painting to the time of Zimri-Lim (1775–1762 BCE), a contemporary of Hammurapi (1792–1750 BCE), and the last resident of the palace before its destruction by the Babylonian king around 1762 BCE.⁸ Moortgat’s principal basis on which to propose this date was stylistic. He drew attention to the Mari painting’s depiction of the horned crown of divinity in profile (Fig. 7), which he considered to have been modeled after the Stela of Hammurapi (Fig. 10), the first extant occurrence of this rendition in the art of Babylonia. In fact, Moortgat connected the “investiture” painting specifically with this stela, a monument



8. Excavation photograph of the façade of the throne room suite in the Mari palace showing the original position of the “investiture” painting. From Parrot, “Les peintures du palais de Mari,” Fig. 7.



9. Schematic drawing of the façade of the throne room suite in the Mari palace showing the original position of the “investiture” painting. From Parrot, *Mari: capitale fabuleuse*, 119, Fig. 68. © Editions Payot, 1974, Bibliothèque.



10. The relief carving on the Stela of Hammurapi, Old Babylonian period. Paris, Louvre. Photo: author.

originating in the later years of Hammurapi’s reign.⁹ The standard manner of showing the horned crown in ancient Mesopotamian art was a frontal depiction throughout the third millennium BCE, as seen in the commemorative relief sculpture of the Ur III period (Fig. 11).

Jean-Claude Margueron, the previous excavator of Mari, however, criticized Moortgat’s giving precedence to the art of Babylonia in the development of anything original in the visual arts.¹⁰ He posed the question what if it was in Mari that the depiction of the horned crown in profile was first developed and it was Babylonia that borrowed it from its northern cousin? Thus, he



11. A fragment of the Stela of Urnamma (2112–2095 BCE) (the “good face” of the stela) showing the king libating in front of the moon god Nanna, Neo-Sumerian period (ca. 2112–2004 BCE). Philadelphia, Penn Museum. Courtesy of Penn Museum, image no. 152349.

proposed to move the date of the “investiture” painting about 40 years earlier, from the destruction of the palace by Hammurapi, to the time of Yahdun-Lim, father of Zimri-Lim, and “the first true ruler of Mari in the Old Babylonian period.”¹¹ In this study, I concentrate on the meaning behind the imagery of the “investiture” painting rather than the complex and long-standing debate on the dating of the Mari paintings and its implications for the chronology of the palace. Here, the discussion of the chronology is important inasmuch as there is no disputing the wider frame for dating the painting sometime in the first several decades of the eighteenth century BCE, the height of the Old Babylonian period.¹²

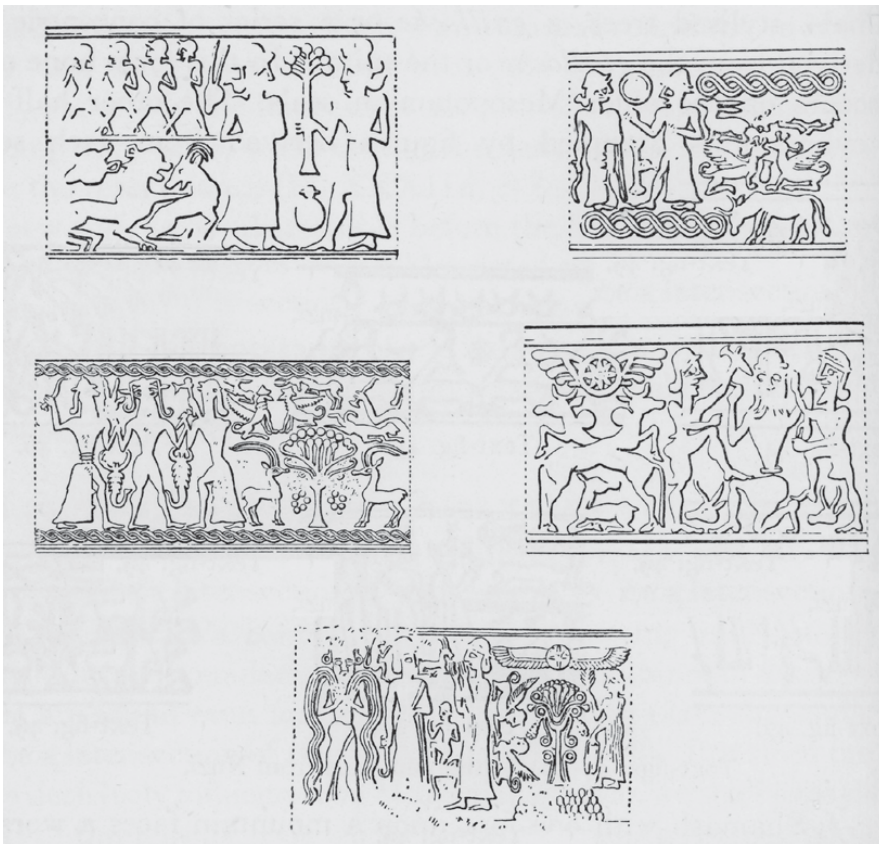
THE MARI PAINTING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ART OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

The painting is the first extant image in ancient Mesopotamian history that offers a clear visual expression of the division and connection between a sacral terrestrial domain and its celestial counterpart. The terrestrial in the Mari painting is the lower register of the central panel featuring the flowing vase, and the celestial is the upper register featuring Ishtar, the ancient Mesopotamian lady of heaven and a goddess co-extensive with the star Venus (Fig. 7). These two domains are aligned vertically within a framed unit, communicating the potential of movement or transition between them. The painting presents the earliest attested paradigm in the art of ancient Mesopotamia for formulaic bipartite images that feature a terrestrial visual element, such as a stylized plant, the flowing vase, or a combination of both, with a celestial signifier placed above it, such as the winged disk of the later periods. In this regard, it deserves detailed scrutiny from a cosmological perspective.

Representations of stylized plants or trees flanked by animals or mythological creatures abound in the art of ancient Mesopotamia prior to the “investiture” painting, as seen in the art of Uruk, Jemdet-Nasr, and Early Dynastic periods of the fourth and third millennia BCE. But none of these images features as clearly delineated a celestial layer or symbol in association with them in a well-rounded format as the central panel of the Mari composition.¹³ Numerous examples of multi-level images come especially from the western Asian artistic traditions of the Late Bronze and Iron Age. They belong to a number of states in northern Mesopotamia, Syria, and Anatolia, such as the Mittanian (ca. 1500–1350 BCE), Hittite (ca. 1400–1200 BCE), and Middle (ca. 1350–1000 BCE) and Neo-Assyrian empires (883–612 BCE). According to Moortgat, key in the formulation of these visual statements is Kerkuk glyptic, the cylinder seals of the Kingdom of the Mittani (Fig. 12).¹⁴ Examples that integrate the flowing vase or water with the terrestrial levels of such stratified compositions are observed particularly in the glyptic art of the Kassite (ca. 1595–1157 BCE) and Assyrian cultures; they incorporate the vase into representations of stylized plants.¹⁵

The intercultural era characterized by the Near Eastern empires of the Late Bronze Age had its foundation in the interculturalism of the Middle Bronze Age, in which the kingdom of Mari was an important player. With its location on the Middle Euphrates, the art of Old Babylonian Mari partakes both of Babylonian and Syro-Mesopotamian artistic idioms, not to mention its openness to influences from Egypt and the Aegean.¹⁶ As a state in Syria, the kingdom of Mari lies closer than does Babylonia spatially and conceptually to the artistic ideas that developed in northern Mesopotamia and Anatolia in the Late Bronze and Iron Age. Although not an empire, as a kingdom with a significant sphere of regional territorial control, Mari belonged to the same political milieu as the kingdoms of Shamshi-Adad (ca. 1808–1776 BCE) of Assyria and Hammurapi (1792–1750 BCE) of Babylon. It was engulfed by both in the eighteenth century BCE.¹⁷ These two territorial states laid the political groundwork for the great empires of the Late Bronze and Iron Age in Western Asia.

There is an uninterrupted chain of artistic production in the medium of wall painting in Syria and Mesopotamia from the Middle Bronze through the Iron Age, as attested in the archaeological record, albeit in highly fragmentary condition, constituted by finds from Alalah, Qatna, Nuzi, Dur Kurigalzu, and Kar Tukulti-Ninurta from the Late Bronze Age; and those from Til Barsib and the Neo-Assyrian royal palaces from the Iron Age. By virtue of its hieratic figural repertoire of Babylonian descent, the Mari painting has more in common with ancient Mesopotamian examples of wall painting and works of art in other artistic media, such as cylinder seals, sculpture, and glazed brick panels, than with extant examples of wall painting from Syria.¹⁸ Fragments of painting from Syrian sites of the Late Bronze Age, such as Alalah and Qatna, show an approach to painting thematically and stylistically quite different from the “investiture” painting. They are much more closely aligned with Aegean traits



12. Drawings of examples of Mittanian cylinder seal impressions featuring “sacred trees” and winged disks. From Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, 184 (Text-figs. 50–54).

than is painting in Mari, despite the latter’s incorporating running spirals and a degree of naturalism, as discussed further in [Chapters 2](#) and [4](#).¹⁹

The principal components of the Mari painting that connect it with remains of wall painting surviving from Mesopotamia in the second and first millennia BCE are elements of frame, ornament, a compartmentalized approach to compositions of scenes, and, to a certain extent, figural imagery.²⁰ A degree of resemblance in imagery is seen particularly in the decoration of the palace of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244–1208 BCE) at Kar Tukulti-Ninurta, which features stylized trees flanked by winged bird-headed figures, and the wall painting from Residence K of Sargon II’s citadel at Khorsabad depicting the conferral of the ring and rod on the king by the god Ashur.²¹ Also related in figure and composition is another Neo-Assyrian work in a medium close to painting, the glazed brick panel of Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE) from the throne room suite of Fort Shalmaneser at Nimrud.²² All these works of art make use of frames, compartmentalization, and ornamental bands, which are concentric in the case of the Khorsabad painting and Fort Shalmaneser glazed brick panel.

The Kar Tukulti-Ninurta and Khorsabad paintings, however, do not juxtapose two different principal layers of figural representation within a meaningful whole. As for the Fort Shalmaneser glazed brick panel, as a descendant of the so-called "sacred tree" relief of the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II (Fig. 3), it does feature two primary layers in its central field. Nevertheless, it extracts the terrestrial tree from its usual location and places it above the winged disk. In spite of the overlaps in technique, ornament, and imagery between the Mari painting and wall painting and glazed brick panels in ancient Mesopotamia at large, the study of the "investiture" painting need not be confined to a framework determined by artistic medium alone. Its composition and imagery are in conversation with many works of art from different traditions in the ancient Near East in a variety of media.

Surely, the best crystallization in the art of ancient Mesopotamia of the binary compositional principle of the terrestrial and celestial can be found in the "sacred tree" relief from the throne room of the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud (Fig. 3), the first capital city of the Neo-Assyrian Empire upon the shift away from Assur.²³ The panel, along with its damaged counterpart from the same space, is the only composition in relief sculpture from the art of the Neo-Assyrian Empire that shows the tree surmounted by the winged disk and flanked by two representations of the royal figure. By contrast, early Neo-Assyrian palaces abound in relief images of the "sacred tree" depicted alone and those that show it flanked only by winged mythological figures without the king and the winged disk. As such, the throne room "sacred tree" panel of Ashurnasirpal II is a truly unique work of art that warrants that special emphasis be placed on it in the scholarship on the art of ancient Mesopotamia. This panel constitutes a summation and culmination in the Iron Age of a long-standing Late Bronze Age artistic tradition featuring emblematic designs of stylized trees, winged mythical figures, and winged disks, here combined with the royal figure. In its uniqueness, semantic denseness, and figural and compositional repertoire, it is a direct counterpart to the Mari painting, found also in the context of a throne room suite, across the one-thousand year period of time that separates, or connects, them.

A hallmark of the northern Mesopotamian and Anatolian visual imagery of the Late Bronze Age, the winged disk is absent from the Mari painting. However, with its placing the domain of the celestial goddess Ishtar above an aquatic terrestrial realm, characterized also by stylized plants growing out of the flowing vases, the Mari painting is aligned structurally with these later compositions. Among the other characteristics of the painting that speak to this affinity are the "sacred" trees and winged mythical beings depicted prominently in its outer field and the overall symmetrical design of its composition. Last but not least, Ishtar's holding the ring and rod in the upper field of the Mari central

panel is a direct antecedent of the inclusion of the ring, although without the rod, in the depiction of the god inside the winged disk in the throne room “sacred tree” relief of Ashurnasirpal II (Figs. 3 and 13). In other examples of the Assyrian winged disk, the god within also holds weapons (Fig. 14), paralleling the warlike attributes of Ishtar shown in the Mari painting (Fig. 7).



13. Detail of Fig. 3 showing the Assyrian winged disk. Photo: author.



14. Relief panel showing a battle scene with the Assyrian winged disk from the throne room (Room B) of Ashurnasirpal II in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud, Neo-Assyrian period. London: British Museum. Photo: author.

In certain ways, the "investiture" painting is still within the artistic idiom of what Moortgat had characterized as Sumero-Akkadian art, the imagery of, say, the art of Sargon of Agade (ca. 2334–2279 BCE), Gudea (ca. 2100 BCE), and Ur-Namma (ca. 2112–2095 BCE).²⁴ But it is also novel in its conversation and concordance with the iconographic paradigms of the Syro-Mesopotamian and Anatolian cultures of the several centuries that follow the Old Babylonian period. Much more than other extant works of art from the Old Babylonian period, such as the Stela of Hammurapi, it is the lynchpin between the "classical" art of Babylonia and the eclectic trends that characterize the art of the great empires of the Late Bronze and Iron Age based in northern Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Egypt.

THE AFFINITY BETWEEN MARI AND ASSYRIA

The Old Babylonian period culture of Mari and the Neo-Assyrian Empire share, more than any other states in ancient Mesopotamian history, a well-documented presence of scholars and specialists associated with the royal palace, especially experts on prophecy and divination.²⁵ Even though the written attestation for Neo-Assyrian prophecy comes exclusively from the Nineveh archives of tablets dating to the reigns of Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE) and Ashurbanipal, there is reason to assume that the practice had an earlier history in Assyria.²⁶ As intellectuals in their own right, the master iconographers responsible for the design and execution of the regal works of art belonging to these two courts were likely closely familiar with these scholarly milieus. As such, a comparative treatment of the Mari painting and the Assyrian "sacred tree" panel from Nimrud as bearers of special knowledge is essential.

Among the primary activities of the specialists at Old Babylonian Mari, prophecy and divination had the most important place. Both activities were concerned with validating actions taken in the present and their consequences for the immediate future in the political and military affairs of the state.²⁷ Such an emphasis in governmental matters on prophecy and its confirmation through divination may point to the presence of a theoretical or speculative background to these practices as well. Divination had close links with conceptions both of history and temporality, particularly in its capacity to make the future an object of scrutiny, relating an empirical perspective focused on individual phenomena to larger patterns or structures within the cosmic order. The intellectual background both of prophecy and divination may also have been connected more fundamentally with conceptions of the past, present, and future; or those of sacral time and history on a philosophical level, the semantic content I propose here both for the Mari painting and the Assyrian "sacred tree" panel.²⁸

CONCEPTIONS OF RENEWAL IN THE MARI PAINTING

As a working hypothesis, I posit that the association between the terrestrial and celestial conveyed visually in the central panel of the “investiture” painting speaks to the presence in Old Babylonian Mari of an intellectual speculation on the relation between a primeval past, expressed through the terrestrial, and a possible conception of an ideal future, expressed through the celestial. This relation is presented within the paradigm of the periodic renewal of the cosmic order at a fundamental level as signaled by the outer composition and frame of the painting (Figs. 2, 5, and 7). The idea of renewal in the Mari painting is communicated to the viewer most immediately through an ideal, or paradisiac, garden (Figs. 2 and 5). It is further signaled through the occurrence in the painting’s imagery of the flowing vase, a motif not only symbolizing notions of agrarian fertility but also regeneration and purity, especially in its connection with the ancient Mesopotamian god of the sweet subterranean water sources and ritual purity, Enki/Ea.²⁹ With its endlessly flowing streams of water gushing out of as limited in size an element as a small vessel, the flowing vase is surely a magical symbol whose meaning must not have been confined to agrarian abundance. In the painting, recurrent renewal is also signaled in the abstract by the frame of the running spirals surrounding the entire composition.

Renewal or regeneration in its basic sense is a seasonal matter in ancient Mesopotamia, particularly manifest in the celebration of the New Year’s festival in different states and periods throughout its history.³⁰ As for the idea of a radical renewal of a world order already in existence, preceded by a total destruction thereof, it is preserved in one particular mythical incident, the Flood. While any instance of seasonal renewal associated with the calendar would have had relevance to the visual statement found in the Mari painting, a renewal of the cosmic order may be considered much more commensurate with the regal depth and importance of such a work of art. Thus, we can examine elements of the imagery and composition of the “investiture” painting in light of the paradigm offered by the “classical” Babylonian Flood myth, especially its aftermath in the form of the establishment of a paradisiac land of longevity in which the immortalized Flood Hero is placed.

The Flood story *per se* does not find figural expression in the art of ancient Mesopotamia. But its crucial place in the religious and intellectual perspective of this culture from at least the first half of the second millennium BCE may be thought to have had its impact on the visual domain. As W. F. Albright underlined as early as 1919, the symbolism of the flowing vase cannot be divorced from some of the principal themes contained in the Flood myth, particularly the land of immortality to which the Flood Hero is transported

in the aftermath of the Deluge.³¹ To that end, a reading of the Mari painting against the exemplar of the Babylonian Flood myth is an essential aspect of the present study.

THE FLOOD MYTH IN THE OLD BABYLONIAN PERIOD

The Old Babylonian period witnessed the composition of the first extant literary texts containing the "classical" Flood story, the *Poem of Atra-ḫasīs*, or the *Atra-ḫasīs Epic*, which places the Flood within the larger framework of the creation of mankind by the gods, the *Sumerian Flood Story*, and the recently discovered *Ark Tablet*.³² As we have seen, the *Sumerian King List*, having taken its final form during the Isin Dynasty, also features the Flood as a benchmark in the historical scheme that it presents. The Old Babylonian version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* included the figure of the Flood Hero as well, although perhaps not the Flood narrative itself.³³ Thus, the prominent place of the Flood as a theme in major texts from the broader Old Babylonian period is clear.³⁴

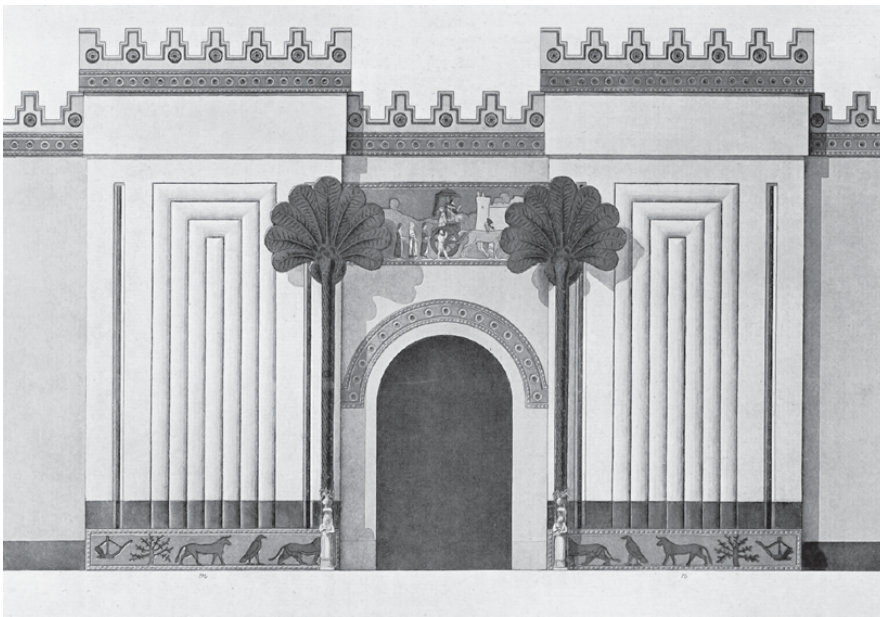
The most complete narrative account of the Flood to have survived from ancient Mesopotamia, however, is Tablet II of the Standard Babylonian version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, redacted and collated in the Neo-Assyrian period. The striking parallels between the Flood stories found in this work and the Old Babylonian *Poem of Atra-ḫasīs* show that we are here dealing with a continuum.³⁵ My engagement with the Flood story in relation to the Mari painting is primarily centered on the themes preserved in the two texts from the Old Babylonian period proper, the *Poem of Atra-ḫasīs* and the *Sumerian Flood Story*. In the meantime, however, I do not suppress aspects of the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh* relevant to the present perspective solely on the basis of the lateness of its date. Some of the themes and images this poem contains, not found explicitly in the extant literature from the Old Babylonian period, may represent ideas and modes of thought belonging to a deeper ancient Mesopotamian tradition, the ramifications of which would be of value in approaching some of the interpretive problems tackled with in this study.

PREVIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

In the scholarship of the last several decades, an understanding of the "investiture" painting as the by and large faithful depiction of a real architectural or spatial locale either within or outside the palace at Mari seems to have been well established. This idea was first expounded in an article by Marie-Thérèse Barrelet in 1950.³⁶ Drawing a visual analogy among the "investiture"

painting, the entrance to the Šin Temple at Khorsabad from the Neo-Assyrian period (Fig. 15), and the Ishtar Gate in Babylon from the Neo-Babylonian (625–539 BCE), Barrelet proposed that the “investiture” painting must depict, within ancient Mesopotamian representational conventions, the component parts of the Ishtar Temple excavated by Parrot to the west of the site, outside the palace.³⁷

The Old Babylonian level of this temple, however, is completely unknown on account of the destruction caused by Hammurapi’s invasion around 1762 BCE. Barrelet based her argument on the plan of the older, pre-Sargonic (Early Dynastic, ca. 2900–2334 BCE), phase of the temple featuring an antecella and a shrine.³⁸ She connected the bottom register of the central panel of the painting with such a putative antecella (Fig. 7). As sculptural comparisons to the two goddesses holding the flowing vase shown in the bottom register of the centerpiece of the painting, Barrelet pointed on the one hand to the statues of divine figures bearing the flowing vase and flanking the entrance of the Šin Temple at Khorsabad (Fig. 15), and on the other to Mari’s very own statue of the goddess holding the same vase, found broken into several pieces in Room 64, part of the throne room suite, and Court 106 (Figs. 8 and 16). Barrelet saw the upper register of the central “investiture” panel as the representation of the inner shrine of the Mari Ishtar temple, where a potential hand-taking ritual, connected with



15. Drawing of the façade of the Šin temple at Khorsabad, Neo-Assyrian Period. Gordon Loud, *Khorsabad Part 1*, 90, Fig. 99.



16. Statue of the goddess holding the flowing vase from the Mari palace, Old Babylonian period. Aleppo: National Museum. Photo Credit: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

an equally probable New Year's festival, may have occurred (Fig. 7). She saw the fruiting date palms shown in the painting in connection with the cult of Ishtar and with natural trees one would have found planted in ancient Mesopotamian sacred precincts (Figs. 2 and 5). As for the trees closest to the central panel, so far unidentified botanically, she proposed that they may be representations of artificial trees, examples of which were found again at the entrance of the Sîn Temple at Khorsabad in the form of wooden cores covered with sheets of bronze.³⁹

Barrelet drew an analogy between the figures shown on the glazed brick compositions flanking the same temple entrance at Khorsabad (Fig. 15), the Assyrian “astroglyphs,”⁴⁰ and the fantastic animals represented in three registers between the natural date palm and the unidentified tree in the “investiture” painting (Figs. 2 and 5). She stated that the Mari figures must represent a similar wall decoration found in the Ishtar Temple. Finally, Barrelet pointed out the band of running spirals framing the Mari painting as a schematic representation of water, suggesting that this element of the composition, coupled with the large tutelary Lama goddesses behind the date palms, might be evoking an architectural and sculptural decoration in molded brick such as

that found on the well-known Innin Temple of Karaindash in Uruk from the Kassite period.⁴¹

In his final archaeological report, as well as another publication, on the Mari paintings, Parrot praised Barrelet's perspective, and finding her argument convincing, proposed only one amendment to it, in that he located the ritual thought to be represented in the scene not in a structure outside the palace but inside it.⁴² He considered the palm trees to have been planted in Court 131, which he identified with the "Court of Palms," a designation textually attested but not identified archaeologically in the palace.⁴³ He thought of the bottom register of the central scene as representing Room 64, connecting the statue of the goddess holding the flowing vase discovered partially in this room (Fig. 16) with the figures of the goddess holding the flowing vase shown in the painting. As for the band of running spirals, Parrot associated it with the painted *faux marbre* decoration found on the upper surface of the podium placed against the south wall of Room 64 (Figs. 8 and 17). Finally, he saw in the upper register of the central panel a rendition of Room 65, the throne room proper.⁴⁴

Taking the spatial model characterizing all these interpretations to the extreme, and building on Parrot's placing the scene inside the throne room suite, Yasin Al-Khalesi in his 1978 work located all the elements of the central panel of the "investiture" painting in Room (Sanctuary) 66, part of Room 65, reached by a flight of stairs.⁴⁵ He understood the bands separating the two registers as a schematic representation of these stairs, and the frame of concentric bands surrounding the panel as a rendition of the recesses inside the doorway leading from Room 65 to Room 66. Even though often carefully articulated, such perspectives deny the "investiture" composition its full representational autonomy and semantic richness, making it a mere derivative in two dimensions of actual three dimensional objects or spatial and architectural elements. The strictly empirical focus on the image's parallelism to real architecture has, for the most part, caused the rich metaphysical aspects embedded in the painting to be overlooked.

ALTERNATIVE VIEWS

In her work on wall painting and glazed brick tiles in the ancient Near East, Astrid Nunn has a brief treatment of the meaning of the "investiture" painting, in which she states that it would be deceptive to see in the central panel of the composition two architectural spaces one above the other.⁴⁶ She aptly posits that the painting as a whole should rather be understood in symbolic terms, with elements of "actuality" also incorporated. Not favoring the usual perception that the scene involving the king and Ishtar depicts a



17. The painted *faux marbre* podium with an outer frame of running spirals from Room 64, the throne room suite of the Mari palace, Old Babylonian period. From Parrot, "Peintures du palais de Mari," pl. 37/1.

clearly defined event or activity, she understands the image as showing the king in the act of experiencing the extraordinary, or the supernatural, in more fundamental terms. Nunn questions the common tendency in scholarship to associate ancient Near Eastern imagery all too readily with cultic procedures or concrete events, underscoring a purer symbolical dimension in its semantics.⁴⁷

Among the few other interpretations of the painting outside the “pictorial imitation” model is Moortgat’s own brief treatment of it in his short monograph on wall painting in ancient Mesopotamia.⁴⁸ Here, the archaeologist sees the composition as a schematic representation of the entire cosmos in mirror symmetry, ranging from the mountain scale pattern, the sign for the chthonic realm, with its mythological quadrupeds symbolizing the netherworld; across the vegetal world that nourishes both human and animal; up to the celestial gods in the firmament, with the blue bird in the air or high on top of the branches connoting the heavenly realm.⁴⁹

Curiously enough, another symbolic interpretation comes from Parrot himself, who seems eventually to have acknowledged the paradisiac associations of the landscape scene in the painting, much later in his career, in his 1974 work on Mari. Drawing a parallel between the imagery of the painting and the description of Eden in the Book of Genesis, Parrot accepts that the Mari painting is certainly not an illustration of the relevant biblical passage, noting, however, that the resemblance is too strong to ignore.⁵⁰ With such a statement, Parrot seems to have taken due notice of the primarily symbolic and conceptual nature of the painting, and moved away from the view that sees in it an actual locale inside or outside the palace at Mari. His observation that the four streams emanating from each of the Mari painting’s flowing vases evoke the notion of the four streams of paradise is also valuable for a reassessment of the meaning of the flowing vase in the study of ancient Mesopotamian art.

Also outside the “pictorial imitation” model is Alfred Haldar’s 1952 reading of the image as Ishtar’s delivering an oracle to the Mari king in association with the “New Year festival.”⁵¹ This interpretation is apt in its connecting the painting with the practice of prophecy, so prominent at the Mari court in the Old Babylonian period.⁵² Even though its literal perspective of seeing the imagery as a depiction of a clearly defined ritual act is not entirely commensurate with the present approach, Haldar’s interpretation offers a parallel to my emphasis on notions of temporality and the future informing practices of prophecy and divination in ancient Mesopotamia and arguably embedded in the “investiture” painting. After all, as is the primary argument of this book, the king may be shown here in the act of receiving the supreme oracle, the

knowledge of the ultimate renewal of the cosmic order, from Ishtar as a deity of prophecy and regal fortune.

Finally, a recent detailed study of the painting by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and Ronan James Head has proposed a much needed symbolic interpretation, highlighting conceptions of royal renewal, with due emphasis on godlikeness, divinization, and priesthood.⁵³ Even though this article may not be, strictly speaking, an art historical study, it sets a well-rounded precedent to my approach here, with its favoring comparison, especially biblical, and the integral traditions of the ancient Near East. There are certain overlaps between this study and mine in the reading of the visual motifs, but in the end, the specifics of framework and argument are also different enough in each endeavor.

A CRITICAL POSITION

In the present essay, I, too, attempt to redress the limitations of the "pictorial imitation" approach to the Mari painting by arguing for the presence of a primarily symbolic semantic system in it. It is important to recognize the potential in the art of the ancient Near East of transcending specific events or clearly defined ritual activities in order to operate in a more fundamental semantic that has a primarily philosophical component. The architectural analogy, however, has utmost value as long as it is not applied literally and rigidly, equating all the elements of the painting with the real, known or putative, architectural features of the site of Mari. Elements of the painting must certainly be understood in reference to architecture, especially those that suggest doorways and stepped structures, be they stairs or stories, but in a cosmic rather than literal sense. Within my proposed symbolic system, it is more appropriate to talk about an architecture "not of this world," representing transitional processes and graded hierarchies predominantly religious in nature. The architectural analogy has additional value in the interpretation of the central panel of the painting as an ideal enclosure crucial to conceptions of cosmic order, both primeval and future, in its sense both of an occluded subterranean enclosure and a heavenly temple.

Even though this study is not focused only on the "investiture" painting, the latter's foundational quality in relation to the regal art of the Late Bronze and Iron Age empires of Western Asia calls for its detailed analysis. As such, the Mari painting functions here as a pilot image driving and guiding the study of a broader corpus of other images as well. Given the interconnectedness of the ancient Western Asian and Egyptian worlds, as well as the continuum in the language of images across the ages of Near Eastern antiquity, the analysis of the Mari painting should be carried out in tandem with that of other

relevant images from Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt, and Anatolia, rather than in a vacuum defined only by the Kingdom of Mari and the Old Babylonian period. Barrelet's work undertook such a diachronic analysis more than half a century ago, without, however, any engagement with the metaphysics of the art of the ancient Near East and Egypt. It is this additional task that the following chapters undertake.

TWO

THE ICONOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF THE MARI PAINTING

In approaching the meaning of the Mari painting, I lay out its distinctive elements that help understand the image as a symbolic system. Two particular symbols are of key importance in deciphering the painting's message, the ring and rod and the flowing vase. Both deserve special focus in the analysis of the composition. Despite many decades of scholarship on the ancient Near East, these symbols are still poorly understood. Here, I do not propose a definite explanation for either of them, but draw attention to those notions that I consider the most relevant to their meaning from a metaphysical perspective.

THE RING AND ROD: BEYOND LEGITIMACY

The Mari painting is dominated by an overall symmetry, despite the lack of the left hand border, which by and large must have mirrored the right hand one (Figs. 2 and 5). The upper register of the central panel is the only area of the composition where a predominantly symmetrical composition is absent, what Margueron has referred to as the “use of dissymmetry in symmetry.”¹ This register features a scene of the conferral of the ring and rod by Ishtar on the king, who may be Zimri-Lim, although this is not certain. The group of the royal figure and the goddess facing each other is flanked by two figures of the tutelary Lama goddess. To the far right of the composition is another divine figure, recognized as such by his horned crown, whose identity is obscure.

The ring and rod, often thought of as insignia of rule and authority, may be measuring or surveying instruments used in the construction of temples. Their symbolism is connected with order and harmony in the cosmos, concepts that underlie the ideology of temple building in ancient Mesopotamia as well. By virtue of their prominent occurrence in the relief on the Hammurapi Stela, they are also seen as objects with overtones of judgment or justice, notions that are cognate with those of balance and measure.² In the visual arts, the ring and rod appear in scenes in which a god holds them, extending them toward the royal figure (Figs. 7 and 10–11).³ In light of the closer physical association of the insignia with the gods than the king, the ring and rod should be thought of as supra-royal symbols. They are part of the royal imagery, but they belong to a sphere above the king, of which the king can partake only under divine supervision.

In occupying the geometric center and focus of attention of the entire composition, its diversion from symmetry, and its featuring an encounter between the royal figure and the goddess, the upper register of the central panel is the climactic point of the Mari painting.⁴ It is on account of this scene that the painting has been dubbed the “investiture” in the study of the art of ancient Mesopotamia. The same formula featuring the conferral of the ring and rod by a god on the king also appears on the Stela of Urnamma from the Ur III period and the Stela of Hammurapi (Figs. 11 and 10, respectively), the latter contemporary with the Mari painting. But in discussions of neither work of art do we usually talk about, say, the “investiture” of Urnamma or that of Hammurapi.⁵

The first occurrence of this designation in relation to the Mari painting is in the initial excavation report by Parrot, in which the archaeologist referred to the composition directly as the “investiture” without any explanation.⁶ Since then, the term has been firmly attached to this work of art. The scholarly audience has hardly asked why we should think of this image as an episode of “investiture.”⁷ Most scholars of ancient Mesopotamia who mention the painting place the word “investiture” in quotation marks, but they do not discuss the concept in relation to the imagery. Handbooks or surveys of ancient Mesopotamian culture and archaeology illustrate, sometimes profusely, the painting or parts of it, with the discussion provided revolving around the quite general theme of the “religious legitimization” of the king.⁸ In this respect, it may be worthwhile to review the phenomenon of “investiture” and its relevance to the composition.

In Assyriology, “investiture” is a technical term referring to the ceremonial or symbolic conferral of royal insignia, particularly the crown, the scepter, and the throne, on the king, be it in association with coronation or not, as attested in texts. Investiture is a wider semantic category than coronation or enthronement, since in addition to ceremonies of coronation, the conferral of insignia

on the king may have been part of rituals of renewal or reconfirmation of the royal office held on an annual basis, perhaps in association with the New Year's festival. It is often unclear in texts whether the conferral is purely symbolic or connected with actual events.⁹ Textual accounts of ceremonies of coronation are not found in ancient Mesopotamia, except for the so-called coronation ritual from the Middle Assyrian period, a text that is not well preserved.¹⁰

Statements of the conferral of insignia on the king are especially attested in the royal hymns of the Neo-Sumerian, Isin-Larsa (ca. 2017–1740 BCE), and Old Babylonian periods.¹¹ The relevant insignia, again mostly the crown, the scepter, and the throne, do not quite correspond as objects to the ring and rod.¹² Various high-ranking gods, especially Enlil, Inanna, Nanna, and Enki, are mentioned as conferring various insignia, with no consistent pattern associating specific insignia with specific deities. There is a wider spectrum of gods conferring regalia in the textual domain than there is in the visual in the representation of the conferral of the ring and rod.

At this stage, given the lack of direct correspondence between textual accounts of “investiture” and the imagery of the conferral of the ring and rod, perhaps it is best to consider, after Nunn, that the scene type is an expression of the king's access to, or experience of, the divine at the supreme level, an access or experience epitomized by the conferral of supra-royal objects not ordinarily available to humanity.¹³ One may specify the nature of this access or experience as emphatically celestial, since in the visual arts it is invariably major gods with a celestial dimension, particularly the three primary celestial divinities, the sun god Shamash, Ishtar (Venus), and the moon god Nanna who are shown handing the ring and rod to the king.¹⁴

Such experience of the divine at the supreme or celestial level may be understood as apotheosis, regardless of whether or not the king was officially deified in the particular period of ancient Mesopotamian history in which the visual formula appears.¹⁵ The experience of the divine at the ultimate level, such as the scene type connotes, cannot be thought of as an ordinary affair. It would result in a major change in the ontology of the person having this experience, bringing him closer to, or even merging him with, the divine. In other words, the one who experiences the divine at this level must himself be thought of as assimilated to or absorbed by the divine, hence apotheosis.

The ancient Egyptian extension of the hieroglyph *ankh*, “life,” by the gods to the king is an analogous act. It represents not only the conferral of life and its renewal on the monarch, but also the process of inviting him to join the divine sphere. In this regard, remarkable in comparison to the fragment from the Urnamma Stela showing the seated Nanna extending the ring and rod (Fig. 11) is a relief scene from the Temple of Sety I (Dynasty 19, 1294–1279 BCE) at Abydos showing the king making an offering to the Memphite god Sokar (Fig. 18). Despite the eight centuries separating these two relief images



18. Relief showing pharaoh offering before the god Sokar, Temple of Sety I, Abydos. Photo: author.

and the stylistic differences between ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian art as epitomized by them, there is a nearly complete systemic match between their primary elements, complete with the vessel containing vegetal elements and the royal libation poured into it. Side by side with the *was* scepter, standing for dominion, the *ankh* hieroglyph held by Sokar is the closest counterpart in the Egyptian image to the ring and rod of the Mesopotamian composition. Thus, both images show the conferral of divine qualities on the king by the gods.

In this framework, apotheosis may be implied as an ontological category within a possible body of knowledge pertaining to human destiny, and not necessarily as a rigid reflection of the contemporary political or official perceptions of the deified status of the king. Here, the king might rather stand for the model human being who is divine, or about to be divine, qualities more appropriately possessed by the leading figures among the intellectual and spiritual elites of royal courts in the ancient Near East, but always attributed or projected by them on to the king himself, or adopted officially by the king in his self-representation.

The status of a deified regal personage in the beyond as judge is attested both in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. The Sumerian poem *Death of Bilgames* depicts the hero Bilgames as judge over the dead in the Netherworld.¹⁶ In their presenting a path of ascent to heaven or apotheosis for the ancient Egyptian king, the Old Kingdom (ca. 2575–2134 BCE) *Pyramid Texts* state that the dead king is not to be judged, but that he will judge.¹⁷ If the ring and rod, as potent

symbols conferred by divinity on the special human being destined to be divine, are about the kind of measure, balance, and harmony that characterizes the ideal cosmic order, their possessor as judge would also perform his act of judgment by the criteria evoked and embodied by these objects. Despite its ostensibly mundane legal implications, the act of judgment evoked by the ring and rod on a monument such as the Stela of Hammurapi (Fig. 10), too, would be one that pertains to a judgment associated with a religious sphere and the beyond, just as in New Kingdom Egypt the dead are judged in the afterlife in accordance with *ma'at*, the true balance in the cosmos.¹⁸ As stressed by Norman Yoffee, in the epilogue of his stela inscription (l. 90), Hammurapi indicates that he was bestowed by the sun god Shamash “not with laws but with ‘truth’ (*kinātum*),” a word “appropriate mainly in religious thought,” referring to “law that transcends human creativity but whose suprahistorical ideals are those toward which law-makers should strive.”¹⁹

From this vantage point, the “investiture” painting is about that process of divinization or apotheosis, to which I have referred in the [Introduction](#) as the royal destiny, cast here in the guise of the royal inauguration or initiation. The resemblance here to, or evocation of, any putative protocol or ceremony of enthronement, coronation, or renewal thereof, is hence on account of these incidents’ being physical reenactments of such sacral processes in the first place, rather than their being ends in themselves.²⁰ In the final analysis, while the scene type is not easily matched with the technical definition of “investiture” in Assyriology in terms of the specific insignia conferred on the king, it surely is to be understood as the priestly investiture, or initiation, of the highest order, the transformation of a human being into a divine man, or the god man, under the supervision of the gods. After all, underlying the “investiture” of the royal hymns of the Neo-Sumerian, Isin-Larsa, and Old Babylonian periods may be this very notion of initiation and divinization as well. Surely, then, the ring and rod are cousin objects of other royal paraphernalia such as the crown, the scepter, and the throne. We may thus come full circle; since although Parrot provided no explanation in naming the painting the “investiture,” he may indeed have been right in his perception.

THE BUILDER KING

The architectural connection embedded in the ring and rod complements this perspective, in that the ultimate royal duty is to build a temple that is meant to last under special instructions from the divine realm. This temple is often the model of the divine cosmos, whose design is supra-royal, communicated to the king by divinity. Its construction is executed on earth by the king strictly in accordance with a scheme revealed by the gods, as is clear especially in the longest extant temple hymns from ancient Mesopotamian literature,

the cylinders of Gudea.²¹ The celestial implications of ideal sacred structures are clear in ancient Mesopotamian royal inscriptions through metaphors that compare them to mountains reaching heaven or edifices on a par with constellations.²² The sense of permanence and eternity conveyed through an architectural model is certainly of an order different from a paradisiac one expressed through a natural model, the plant and the fountain. These two archetypal models of eternity correspond to the two registers of the central panel of the Mari painting.

GRADATION AND FRAMING

After symmetry, the most distinctive visual aspect of the composition of the Mari painting is its making use of layers, either in the form of registers that contain figural representation or ornamental bands of various colors, parallel and concentric (Figs. 2, 5, and 7). In an effort to follow the visual cues in the painting to determine what they might reveal, I see this compositional strategy as signaling the stages in a particular sacral process or structure, spatial and temporal. As far as spatiality is concerned, we may think of this gradation as the levels of the cosmos traversed in a multi-step act of ascent from the terrestrial to the celestial.²³ As far as temporality is concerned, the layers may represent the consecutive stages of a process, either a multi-step spiritual progress on the part of a special human being, represented by the royal figure, or one that is historical.²⁴

The central panel of the painting and the two lateral panels that flank it have the greatest concentration of such visual use of gradation and framing. The central panel itself is an elaborate frame, constituted by six concentric bands that surround the inner scenes from three sides. The bands have varying colors, brownish red, yellowish red, and white, delineated by a total of seven lines rendered in black.²⁵ They repeat themselves horizontally in bisecting the inner field defined by the rectangular frame. The horizontal bands that divide the two registers may be understood on the analogy of a stairway, not in the sense of their depicting an actual stairway somewhere in the Mari architecture, but a symbolic one leading from what the lower register represents to what the upper stands for. It is reasonable to think of the presence of a coloristic and numerological symbolism here as well, as discussed further below.²⁶

THE FLOWING VASE: BEYOND FERTILITY

In the lower register of the central panel, we see a field entirely different from that of the celestial goddess Ishtar (Fig. 7). This environment is an aquatic one, characterized by figures of the flowing vase. Beyond its basic relevance to agrarian concepts such as the fertility provided by river waters, especially when

they are in flood, in the cultivation of the crops, the flowing vase should be thought of as a symbol of the permanently pure and pristine state of the subterranean aquatic abode of the ancient Mesopotamian god of wisdom Enki/Ea, a source of constant renewal or regeneration.

Enki/Ea's aquatic domain is called the Apsû in ancient Mesopotamian cosmology, a realm that is part of the earth not ordinarily accessible to humanity. The close association of the flowing vase with the god Enki/Ea and the Apsû was made as early as 1919 in Albright's article "Mouth of the Rivers" and in the 1930s' scholarship on the art of the ancient Near East, especially Douglas Van Buren's *Flowing Vase*.²⁷ Albright recognized the image, to which he referred as the "mystic vase," as an emphatically cosmological symbol, and saw it as a representation of the source of the subterranean or terrestrial fresh water. He understood the "mouth" of the rivers as the spot where this water "bursts into the upper world."²⁸ Douglas Van Buren invoked conceptions of ritual purity in addition to those of life-giving waters and fertility in an arid land in understanding the symbol.²⁹ Moortgat understood the motif more simply as the "symbolizing of life," and Frankfort referred to it, also simply, as "the source of all water and hence the origin of life."³⁰

A connection between the flowing vase and paradise was drawn by Léon Heuzey in his study on the basin of Gudea from Lagash (Fig. 19).³¹ Like Douglas Van Buren, Heuzey, too, noted both the simple explanation of the vase as a symbol of living, gushing water and its "legendary" interpretation.³² With much greater emphasis on the latter, he elaborated on the motif's relation to the paradise tradition, thought to be rooted in ancient Mesopotamian culture, especially in its conception of the four streams, as also noted by Parrot in his 1974 study on Mari comparing the depiction of the flowing vases in the "investiture" painting to the four rivers of Eden in the Book of Genesis.³³

Heuzey observed that in the art of ancient Mesopotamia the vase featured either two or four streams, positing that the paradisiac idea of the four rivers was an extension of the phenomenon of the two rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris.³⁴ Albright, too, in his 1919 study laid out documentation for the conceptualization of both the Nile and the Euphrates and Tigris rivers in numeric paradigms of twos and fours.³⁵ In his 1951 work, Geo Widengren also associated the two streams coming out of the vase with the Euphrates and the Tigris, and by extension with the "mouth of the rivers" of the Flood story contained in the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh*, correlating, as did Albright, the phrase "mouth of the rivers" (*pī nārāti*) with that of "at the mouth of the two rivers" (*ina pī nārāti kilallān*) of the bilingual ritual text CT XVI in its description of the location of the mythical *kiškānu* tree.³⁶

The cosmological implications of the flowing vase are particularly clear in the visual configurations in which it is found. Beyond the quadripartite depiction of the streams in the Mari flowing vases, in Assyrian art, the four streams



19. The Basin of Gudea, found in Girsu, Neo-Sumerian period. Istanbul: Museum of the Ancient Orient. Photo: author.

that emanate out of the vase approximate the two diagonals drawn inside a square or rectangle with their point of intersection corresponding to the source of the water, the vase itself. Both the fragments of ivory furniture inlays from the Middle Assyrian period found at Assur and the Neo-Assyrian sculptural depictions of male minor deities holding the vase from the Khorsabad temples show this scheme.³⁷ In a geometric consciousness that perceived the concept of entirety or universe in the form of the “four quarters,” such distinctively quadrangular depictions of the vase cannot be dissociated from notions of cosmology.³⁸

The flowing vase is perhaps one of the most deeply mystical symbols of ancient Mesopotamia. It deserves to be studied and understood better and much more extensively than past and current Assyriology has prescribed. The engagement of the scholars of the first half of the last century with the mythical symbolism of the motif has not been carried on and developed further by later generations.³⁹ This earlier engagement was not thorough in the first place, and with the exception of Albright's and to a certain extent Heuzey's, the interpretations gravitated toward literal explanations concentrating on the life-giving qualities of flowing water. The fertility of an otherwise arid land and an abundance of life-giving waters as divine gifts, to many the most immediate associations of the motif at present, were surely concepts of utmost importance in the climatic conditions of ancient Iraq. However, it would be erroneous to consider these concepts as ends in themselves and leave the symbolism of the

motif there, approaching one of the most powerful emblems of the ancient Mesopotamian artistic tradition solely through the lens of climate, environment, natural resources, economy, prosperity, and the biological gift of life.

Any understanding of life on a metaphysical plane must mean eternal life or immortality. Any understanding of fertility and abundance connected with agrarian notions, especially if they are provided by the miraculous medium of tiny jugs, surely had their counterparts in a philosophical domain in which the endlessness of a pure source of water also meant eternity. It also meant the ritual purity associated with the source of that water, as well as constant regeneration, signaled further by the dual directionality established by the streams of flowing water and the fish, discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.⁴⁰ In *Mythology of Kingship*,⁴¹ I have argued that the Neo-Assyrian relief scenes showing the winged *apkallus* flanking the “sacred tree” and the king may be understood simultaneously as rites of fertilization and purification, the two concepts or processes being interrelated and not conflicting (Fig. 3). I have pointed out that if one undergoes ritual purification, one reaches a new and better state or self, which can be understood metaphorically as reproducing, hence fertility, not necessarily physical but spiritual.

The notion of constant renewal expressed by the flowing vase is noted by Douglas Van Buren in her reading of the motif on the Gudea stela as “inexhaustible abundance, and waters ever renewed.”⁴² Douglas Van Buren also sees the Gudea statue with the flowing vase as not showing the ruler in purely mortal guise; “fish would never swim up the body of a mortal man” (Fig. 20).⁴³ In his comparative treatment of the art and thought of ancient western Asia and India, Coomaraswamy, too, considers the ancient Mesopotamian flowing vase from a mythical perspective as the iconographic equivalent of the Indic *soma*: “Iconographically, Soma can be represented either by a plant or a tree, or by the full and overflowing chalice (*kalaśa* = *κύλιξ*) from which a plant is growing; or can be thought of as an inexhaustible spring.”⁴⁴ It would be naïve to think of the ancient Mesopotamian flowing vase solely as a symbol of agrarian fertility or merely as a literal manifestation of the reliance on flowing water in southern Mesopotamia.

In the study of the art and culture of the ancient Near East, particularly Mesopotamia, because of the agrarian nature of the societies that characterized civilization, scholars have been conditioned to interpret all the emblematic or symbolic visual elements depicting aquatic, vegetal, or animal motifs from prehistory on as manifestations of the fertility of the land enabled by successful governance or kingship. Few examples in the scholarship of the last several decades display any sustained interest in seeing these motifs as translations of what they depict literally into a semantic dimension other than the one defined by agriculture, abundance, and effective rule. Even those studies that have emphasized a shamanic component in artistic production during



20. Statue of Gudea holding the flowing vase, found in Girsu, Neo-Sumerian period. Paris, Louvre. Photo Credit: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

the Neolithic and Chacolithic, such as Root's *This Fertile Land* and Charvát's *Iconography of Pristine Statehood*, both cited favorably in the [Introduction](#), see the religious or spiritual component of the relevant images restricted to their expressing the divine capability to ensure the fertility of the land. We need more studies of the genuine metaphysics embedded in such imagery, such as altered states, initiation, denial of death, rebirth, or liberation from the constraints of time and the cosmos.

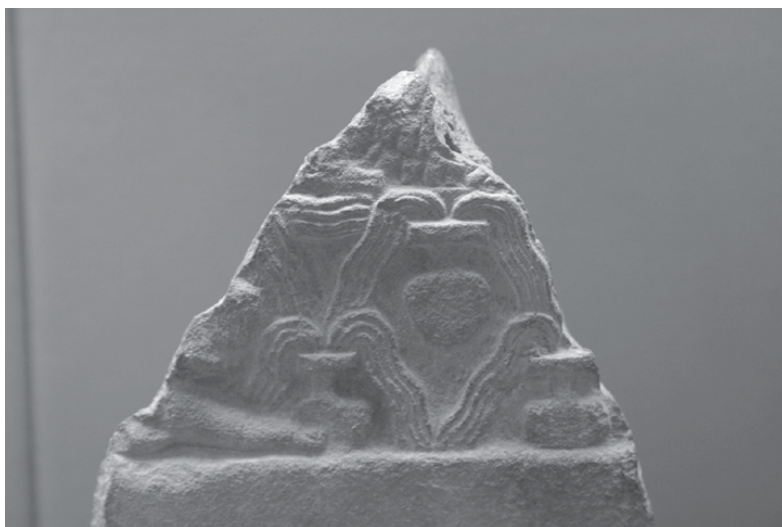
AQUATIC ENDLESSNESS

The sense of endlessness conveyed by the flowing vase is confirmed and furthered by designs that combine a number of vases in geometric systems or networks of vessels interconnected by streams ([Figs. 21–22](#)). The fact that within these configurations there often is no clarity as to the origin and destination of the flowing streams is indicative of the cyclical and magical endlessness communicated by these designs. As Douglas Van Buren puts it elegantly:

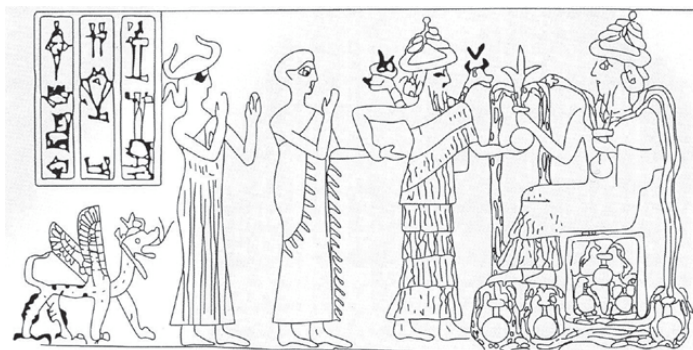
the play of crossing or intertwining lines affords boundless opportunities to the artist to cover the field with a network of exquisite and complicated patterns which seem to shimmer and dissolve, only to reform themselves into new and more entrancing designs.⁴⁵

In the stela fragments (Fig. 21) and seal of Gudea (Fig. 22), we see a pattern that features superimposed rows of flowing vases in which the vases are staggered such that not one is exactly above the other, all connected by streams. In Kassite and Assyrian glyptic of the second half of the second millennium BCE, aerial and terrestrial vases are linked along the vertical by streams, again with no clear sense of origin and destination.⁴⁶

This source of aquatic endlessness is also a medium of access, almost a doorway, to a domain of ritual and paradisiac purity presided over by the god Enki/Ea, the Apsû itself. Indeed, the motif of the fish swimming along the streams, mostly toward the source of the water, strengthens this meaning. Fish possess agility and capabilities of navigation and access in an extraordinary realm,



21. Stela fragment of Gudea showing a pattern of staggered flowing vases, found in Girsu, Neo-Sumerian period. London, British Museum. Photo: author.



22. Drawing of the design on the cylinder seal of Gudea showing a network of flowing vases in the throne of the seated deity. Paris, Louvre. From Delaporte, *Catalogue des cylindres*, vol. I, 12.

water, not available to many other members of the animal world either on land or in the sea. Thus, rather than symbols of animal resources and fecundity, fish connote restricted reach and access to realms not ordinarily open to humanity. Closely connected with the flowing vase is a plant of life, again meaning immortality, which is also the object of the quest of Gilgamesh in the Standard Babylonian version of the epic, which the hero grabs in the Apsû.⁴⁷ The bond between the water of life and a plant of life in ancient Mesopotamian culture and art was observed and highlighted lucidly by Albright, Widengren, as well as Coomaraswamy.⁴⁸ The related “Elysian” dimensions of the Apsû were also acknowledged by Samuel Noah Kramer.⁴⁹

In relation to the concept of the “sacred tree” found both in Indian and western Asian traditions, Eliade wrote: “the tree represents ... the *living cosmos*, endlessly renewing itself. Since inexhaustible life is the equivalent of immortality, the tree-cosmos may therefore become, at a different level, the tree of ‘life undying.’”⁵⁰ This statement certainly refers to fertility and abundance, but in their proper metaphysical context, as opposed to confining them merely to their literal agrarian sense.⁵¹ These paradigms have largely been ignored by current trends in the study of the art of ancient Mesopotamia and Assyriology, except perhaps solely in a historiographic sense, whereby they are treated as early antiquarian efforts to make sense of the art of the ancient Near East.⁵² Many of these older views, however, might be far closer to the authentic threads of meaning connecting the key motifs of this artistic tradition than their contemporary perceptions as auspicious and apotropaic images of societies with agrarian concerns inhabiting an arid environment.

In an attempt to revive the wisdom of the early scholars in understanding the art of the ancient Near East, I consider these views beyond matters of antiquarian or historiographic interest, and as possessing genuine validity in the interpretation of the visual language of ancient Mesopotamia, a premier window to the intellectual perspective of this culture. With its featuring prominently both the flowing vase and a garden, the Mari painting falls undoubtedly within the semantic domain determined by paradisiac notions. The lower register of its central panel is clearly a representation of the Apsû, even though its god, Enki/Ea, is not shown in it. As such, this register depicts a supernatural terrestrial realm.

ISHTAR AND EA

Both Ishtar and Ea were part of the religion of Mari in the Old Babylonian Period.⁵³ Even though the patron deity of Mari was Itur-mer, a political god, Ishtar in her manifestation as “Ishtar of the Palace” (*Ištar ša ekallim*) was one of the deities associated with the palace and its ruling dynasty.⁵⁴ A festival honoring Ishtar and the royal house, which took place in the late autumn and early

winter months, was the most important event in the ritual calendar of Mari during the reign of Zimri-Lim.⁵⁵ This ritual entailed the introduction of the goddess into the palace and a funerary meal presented to the ancestors and members of the royal house (*kispum*).⁵⁶ There is also evidence for the involvement of prophecy, prophets, and musicians in this annual Ishtar festival.⁵⁷ The goddess was one of the chief divinities of royalty and a crucial religious force at Old Babylonian Mari.

Beyond their specific roles in the religion and ritual calendar of Mari, however, Ishtar and Ea may be present in the central panel of the painting in their basic ancient Mesopotamian symbolism, Ishtar as the lady of heaven, and Ea as the lord of a pure and primordial earth.⁵⁸ Not every aspect of the palatial imagery of an ancient Near Eastern state must be understood solely in light of the ritual events taking place at or around the palace establishment. The kind of visual thinking that guided artistic production in the ancient Near East prioritized thoughts and themes additional to, or independent of, the politico-religious data available to us through the contemporary written record, such autonomy being one of the prerogatives of visual communication. Thus, Ishtar and Ea set the tone for the crucial relation between the upper register as celestial and the lower as terrestrial realms in the articulation of the cosmology of the painting.

AN AQUATIC DOORWAY

The lower register of the central panel is by and large in conformity with the symmetry that dominates the entire composition, with two goddesses holding the flowing vase, out of which emanate a central plant and four streams (Figs. 2, 5, and 7). These goddesses are different in kind from the Lama goddesses with raised hands, as the folds of their dresses are continuous in the form of uninterrupted wavy bands, paralleling in form and color the bands of the central frame. The inner ones of the farther-reaching streams of the flowing vases are connected with a horizontal stream. Swimming toward the right on this stream is a single fish, an instance of deviation from absolute symmetry.

The horizontal stream, along with the two inner farther-reaching streams from the flowing vases, defines a rectangular doorway-like gap. This gap is roughly along the same vertical axis as the figures of Ishtar and her lion in the upper register. While the upper register signals fullness and presence through the figure of the goddess, the lower register denotes void and absence through the empty space defined by the aquatic rectangle. One could see in this rectangle an echo of the entirety of the central frame whose three sides are rendered similarly with parallel lines and bands. Such

parallelism may be perceived as an almost *mis-en-abîme* manner of concentric framing that permeates the painting.

With its paratactic clarity of action composed of five anthropomorphic figures of the same height, Ishtar's being slightly taller notwithstanding, the upper register of the central panel is compositionally and semantically determinate. As for the lower register, with its ambiguity in the horizontal stream's direction of flow, the presence of the central gap, and the duality in the directions in which the fish swim in the streams, it is compositionally and semantically indeterminate. I put forward the designations determinate and indeterminate as working concepts in the process of visual analysis, and not as categories of value judgment. I propose that semantic indeterminacy is a meaningful device in the articulation of the message of the painting. It is an integral component of what the lower register stands for, a zone or domain of transition and mediation vis-à-vis the upper register.

In light of the association of the flowing vase with the Apsû and the god Enki/Ea, the empty space in the lower register is an area that might be occupied by the god, were he present. Such absence on the part of Enki/Ea implies an occluded character associated with him. After all, his realm is a subterranean aquatic crypt, out of reach and out of sight. With its resemblance to a doorway, however, the empty space is also a medium of transition, plausibly from the domain represented by the lower register to the one represented by the upper, just as the flowing vase itself is a medium of access or entrance to Enki/Ea's domain of purity. There is something "magical" about the lower register with its aquatic doorway and with what the curvilinear lines representing the streams and the fish swimming in them achieve visually. And yet, in it there is also something unfulfilled and open ended. By contrast, the upper register is static and visually less enchanting. But in it there is something firm, fulfilled, and determinate, with the ring and rod as the supreme symbols of celestial divinity handed over to the Mari king.

THE CENTRAL PANEL: BEYOND A RECTANGULAR FRAME

The two registers of the central frame of the painting are fully separated from each other, but the doorway aspect of the lower register and the stairway aspect of the horizontal bands between them connote the availability of movement or transition from one to the other. The concentric bands that constitute the frame around the central panel signal in a condensed and abstract manner the principle of ascending gradation permeating the painting, both at the proposed spatial and temporal levels. But there must be more to the central frame; it has a somewhat iconic quality. It almost defines an architectonic enclosure, a hermetically sealed capsule, that has no ostensible channel of communication



23. Akkadian cylinder seal impression showing the god Ea seated inside the Apsû as a rectangular enclosure. Baghdad, Iraq Museum. From Woolley, *Ur Excavations* 2, pl. 215, no. 364.



24. Akkadian cylinder seal impression showing the god Ea seated inside the Apsû as a rectangular enclosure. London, British Museum. Photographic credit: The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

with the field outside it. Given the supernatural connotations of the overall composition, it makes sense to think of this clearly delineated central geometric statement in reference to a divine enclosure, and to look at the art of ancient Mesopotamia for a possible model.

The most relevant comparison entails renditions on cylinder seals from the Akkadian period of the aquatic residence of Enki/Ea, the Apsû, shown also as a fully sealed square or rectangular enclosure, whose sides are articulated by bands and/or streams of water (Figs. 23–25). On one of these seals, in addition to an outer frame of aquatic bands, the enclosure is also characterized at its bottom by horizontal bands on which the god steps, comparable to those bisecting the Mari central enclosure (Fig. 25). In these representations, Enki/Ea is shown seated or standing inside the enclosure, with streams of water coming out of his shoulders, accompanied outside by his associates, the mythical six-curved *lahmus* and his two-faced “vizier” Usmû.



25. Akkadian cylinder seal impression showing the god Ea standing inside the Apsû as a rectangular enclosure with steps at its bottom. London: British Museum. From Hayes Ward, *Seal Cylinders*, no. 648.

More than half a century ago, Barrelet drew attention to the loops at the corners of some of these aquatic enclosures in order to point out a resemblance to the running spirals framing the Mari painting and to strengthen her argument that these spirals represent water (Figs. 23–24).⁵⁹ What Barrelet did not take notice of, however, is the larger analogy between Enki/Ea’s abode as depicted on such seals and the central rectangular frame of the painting. This affinity is especially clear in the seal that features the horizontal step-like bands inside the enclosure (Fig. 25). None of the rectangular enclosures representing the Apsû in Akkadian glyptic, however, is bisected by central bands to yield two registers (Figs. 23–25). In the Mari painting, it is as if the enclosure of the Apsû were taken as the format for the entirety of the central frame, but then the Apsû proper were placed only in its lower register, with the goddess Ishtar and the Mari king of the upper register constituting a celestial intrusion into what in essence is a terrestrial, or subterranean, divine enclosure (Figs. 2, 5, and 7). What the artist here did is surmount the terrestrial with the celestial within the terrestrial’s own spatial confines. Rather than fully iconic, the frame of the central panel is thus diagrammatic, a visual mode that also applies, to a certain extent, to the lateral panels of the painting with their stratified levels.

Frames that are an integral part of the pictorial composition are rare in the art of ancient Mesopotamia. They characterize particularly what little remains of works of art in the media of painting and glazed brick panels, such as the examples from Dur Kurigalzu, Kar Tukulti-Ninurta, Fort Shalmaneser at Nimrud, and Khorsabad, cited in the [previous chapter](#). In the “investiture” painting, we see clear manifestations of what Meyer Schapiro identified as frames that belong to the “virtual space” of the image rather than the image’s material surface or the viewer’s space.⁶⁰ Both the frame of the centerpiece of the Mari painting and that of the running spirals around the entire composition are frames that belong to the cosmic space of the painting. As such, they

are not mere organizational devices that help articulate the composition for a viewer, but they indeed represent aspects of the cosmos as ultimate boundaries, in this case manifestations of the Apsû, within the visual program of the painting.

In addressing the “histories” of framing in the visual arts, David Summers, too, invokes examples from ancient Egyptian art, in which the horizontal sky hieroglyph, supported by vertical hieroglyphs of theocratic concepts, such as the *was*, dominion, sets the ultimate spatial boundary for scenes of royal rituals of renewal and offering from the Middle Kingdom and New Kingdom.⁶¹ Here as well, elements of frame are not simply delineations of an abstract organizational nature, while they are not fully figural or iconic either. In this respect, identifying an intermediate diagrammatic mode in the art of the ancient Near East and Egypt may be an appropriate conceptual tool in approaching the semantics of frames in these artistic traditions.

HEAVEN IN EARTH

In order to clarify further this diagrammatic component in the representation of a process of renewal and ascent, one would benefit from observing a visual tradition in ancient Egypt. A number of centuries later than the Mari painting, the New Kingdom royal Books of the Netherworld inscribed and painted on the walls of the tomb interiors in the Valley of the Kings at Thebes feature just such a process of transition and ascent within a predominantly diagrammatic format (Figs. 26–27).⁶² This visual corpus presents notions of sacral time, eternity, and renewal in their clearest visual expression in the greater ancient Near East of the second millennium BCE.

In contrast to the Mari painting, which makes its statement of renewal and transition from the terrestrial to celestial in one single image governed by symmetry, the Egyptian scenes of the netherworld are much more extensive in depicting step by step the journey of the sun god in the netherworld through the twelve hours of the night, especially in the earlier books of the *Amduat* and the *Book of Gates* (Figs. 26–27).⁶³ The twelve hours start with sunset and end with sunrise. Each hour is both a temporal and spatial unit and a field of representation delineated by bands and registers. In both the *Amduat* and the *Book of Gates*, an all-encompassing frame surrounds the entire series, denoting the netherworld as an enclosure.

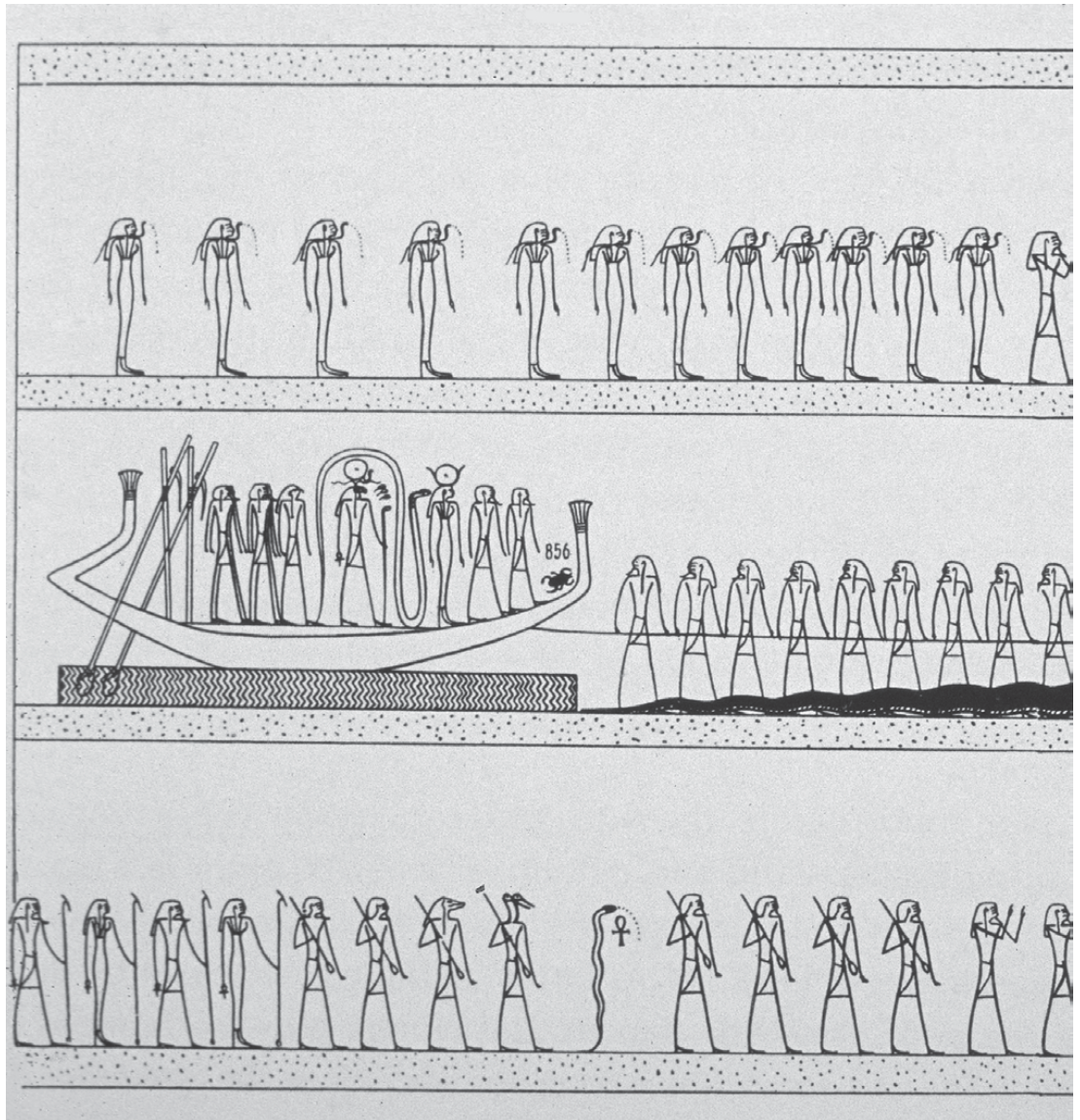
Even though the possible conceptions of renewal and ascent in the Mari painting are not solar, both a subterranean realm and its celestial counterpart are shown in the image. Along with the sun and the moon, the star Venus, represented by Ishtar, is one of the three principal celestial bodies of the ancient Mesopotamian heavens. As such, celestial is a broad category, of which the sun, the moon, and the stars are all part. Furthermore, the sun, the moon,

and the star Venus have a degree of semantic equivalency in the art of ancient Mesopotamia, particularly apparent in the way they are treated in the upper fields of ancient Mesopotamian commemorative monuments, as discussed in greater detail in [Chapter 5](#). Along these lines, an artificial distinction I would like to make at the outset in terminology is also one between “stellar” and “astral,” even though these two words are synonyms, the former derived from Latin and the latter from Greek.

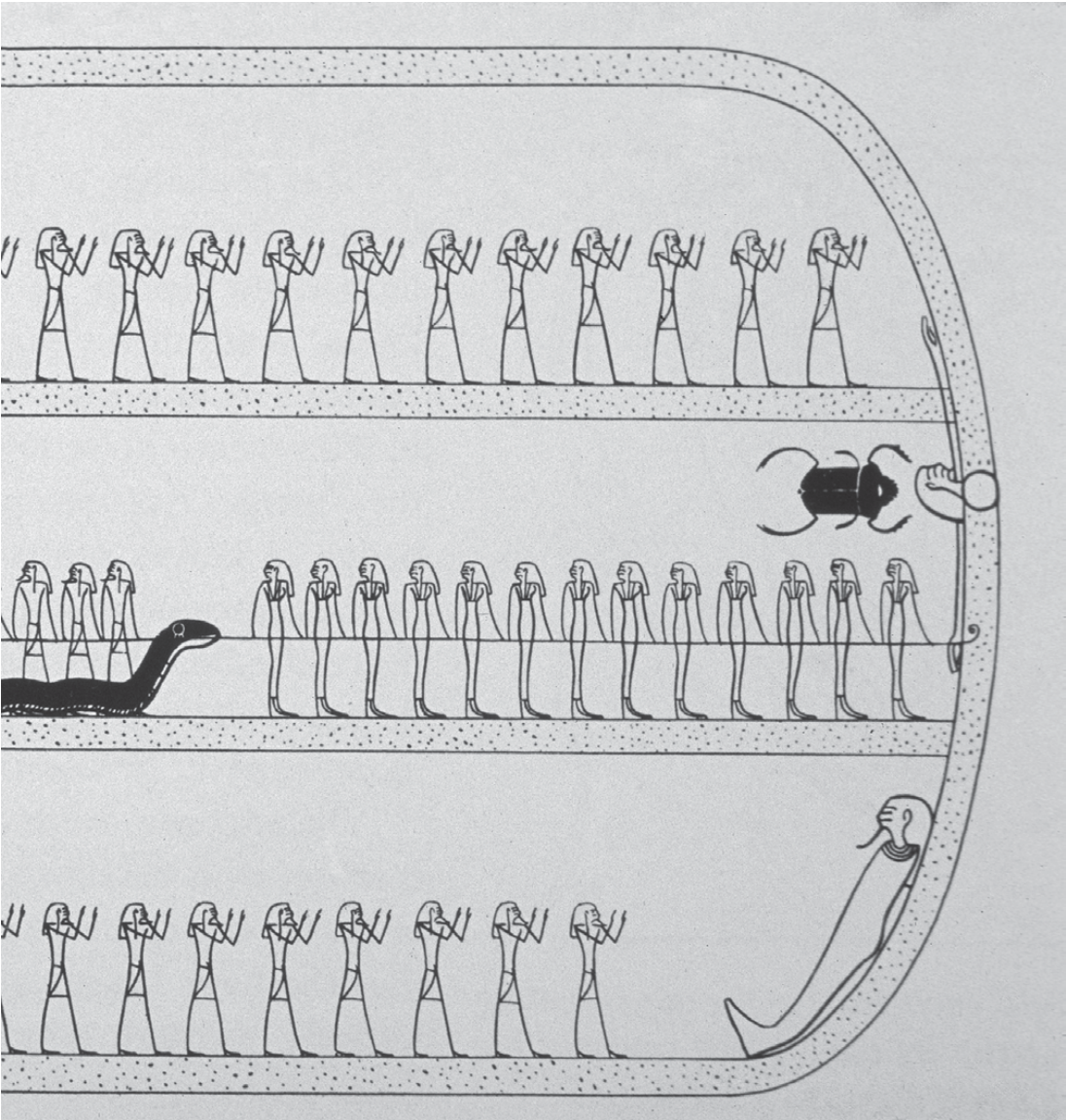
By stellar, I refer here to stars as such, especially Venus and its standard symbol in ancient Mesopotamian art, the eight-pointed star. As for astral, I use this term in reference to implications of key celestial bodies when they bear the capacity to connote notions and realms above and beyond their own and other cosmic limitations. In other words, by astral, which I sometimes use interchangeably with “supra-solar,” particularly in the study of the Hittite double winged-disk in [Chapter 5](#), I mean the potential in the solar, lunar, and stellar entities and images to express transcendent notions. In this respect, the three principal celestial bodies of the Mesopotamian firmament, the sun (solar), the moon (lunar), and Venus (the stellar), could all be the expression of the “astral,” should the context imply it. Thus, the basically stellar, rather than solar, character of the Mari painting should not constitute an impediment to its structural comparison to the Egyptian representations of sunrise; both delineate a step-by-step process of renewal and ultimate ascent with astral connotations.

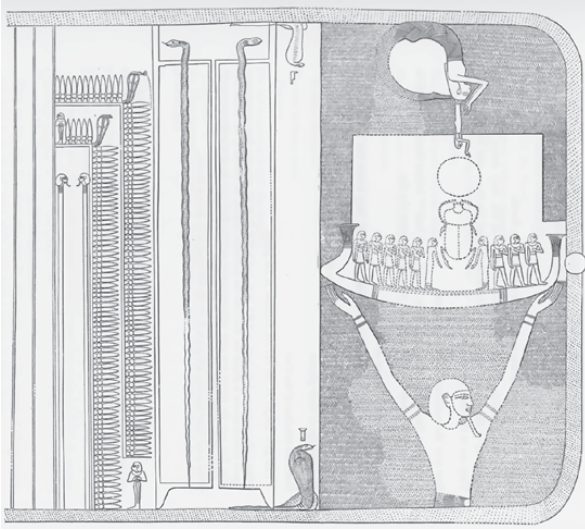
In representations both of the Egyptian *Amduat* and the *Book of Gates*, even the final climactic moment of the nocturnal solar journey at the end of the twelfth hour of the night, the exit of the morning form of the sun god from the netherworld into the eastern horizon, *akhet*, is shown within the boundaries of this gigantic spatial and temporal enclosure. In the final scene of the *Amduat*, the morning form of the sun god, the scarab beetle, is shown inside the frame denoting the netherworld ([Fig. 26](#)). In the *Book of Gates*, a synopsis of the entire journey culminating in the solar ascent is depicted beyond the final gate of the netherworld, but still within the frame constituting the boundaries thereof ([Fig. 27](#)). Here, we may be observing a conceptual affinity to the Mari painting, which also utilizes what may in essence be the boundaries of a subterranean enclosure, the *Apsû*, rendered in an elaborate frame of bands, to accommodate the ultimate moment of the hieratic process it depicts, an ascent to heaven, expressed through the encounter between the royal figure and Ishtar.⁶⁴

Rituals of renewal involving the king were celebrated on an annual basis in the cultures of both ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. The *akitu* festival, best documented in first-millennium BCE Babylonia and Assyria, was the quintessential rite of renewal in ancient Mesopotamia. As for Egypt, the *sed*-festival was the long-standing medium through which conceptions of renewal and longevity were celebrated. In the New Kingdom, the *opet* festival observed in



26. Drawing of the twelfth hour of the ancient Egyptian *Amduat*, Tomb of Ramesses VI (Dynasty 20, ca. 1163–1100 BCE), Valley of the Kings, Thebes. Republished with permission of Princeton University Press, from Piankoff, *Tomb of Ramesses VI*, Fig. 87; permission conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.





27. Drawing of the final scene of the ancient Egyptian *Book of Gates*, Tomb of Ramesses VI. Republished with permission of Princeton University Press, from Piankoff, *Tomb of Ramesses VI*, Fig. 73; permission conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.

Thebes was also about divine (re)birth and the king's refreshed potency.⁶⁵ Not that the Mari painting is a representation of the *akitu*, which is only tangentially attested in the records of Old Babylonian Mari.⁶⁶ Rather, it is the *principle* of renewal, found ordinarily in such rituals in an annually recurring mode, that may have been expressed in its key elements in this work of art. The goddess Ishtar may be present in this context not only as a palatial deity prominent at Mari, but also in her role as the divine medium of renewal *par excellence*, as she always was throughout ancient Mesopotamian history, including her Sumerian manifestation, Inanna.⁶⁷

Both the *akitu* and the *opet* required sealed interior spaces, closed to the outside world, for accommodating the crucial phases of their rituals, the mysteries of renewal. It is only after renewal was achieved thoroughly within this enclosed space that exit from it for public acclamation took place.⁶⁸ Along similar lines, both the New Kingdom Egyptian representations of sunrise (Figs. 26–27) and the Mari painting (Figs. 2, 5, and 7) show the principle of a celestial ascent within the sealed boundary of an essentially terrestrial domain.⁶⁹

What the New Kingdom Egyptian representations of the netherworld achieve in up to twelve different scenes corresponding to the twelve hours of the night, the Mari painting achieves in a single composition. The Egyptian scheme lays out a terrestrial beyond, the netherworld, in both its twelve spatial and temporal phases. In the Mari painting, the gradation suggested by the six concentric and parallel bands of the central panel lays out in a vastly more condensed mode the spatial and temporal stages of an analogous process of

renewal, culminating in ascent. Whereas in ancient Egypt the number twelve is clear in terms of what it represents, it is difficult to ascribe a definite meaning to the number six in the case of the Mari painting, even though an astronomical or cosmological significance is highly likely.

Perhaps, what is today enigmatic to us about this painting would have been less so had more examples of wall painting survived from ancient Mesopotamia, especially contemporary with Old Babylonian Mari, to help establish cross-references in modes of representation. But such a view, common in archaeological inquiry, should not exclude the likelihood that the Mari painting was a unique and unusual composition even in its own day and beyond in the history of ancient Mesopotamian art, the work of an innovative artist-sage, perhaps meant to be a mystery to at least some of its contemporaries as well.

THE MYTHICAL QUADRUPEDS: BEYOND THE APOTROPAIC

As already observed, the outer scene of the Mari painting is quite different in style from its central panel (Figs. 2, 5, and 7).

Margueron notes that while the composition of the painting is regulated by an overarching ternary system, in it there are different principles of organization at work at the same time, responding to different exigencies.⁷⁰ The ternary system observed by Margueron entails the three tiers of mythical quadrupeds and the triple horizontal division of the central area of the painting, with the two figural registers of the central panel complemented by the void in the uppermost zone between the trees.⁷¹ Margueron sees an affinity between this empty space and the one defined by what I have designated the aquatic doorway in the lower register of the central panel. Furthermore, he points out the spatial and semantic continuity between the area above the central panel and the zones above the lateral panels.⁷²

Building on Margueron's ingenious observations on the ternary organizational system and the meaningful use of compositional voids in the painting, I would also point out an affinity among the entirety of the area between the pairs of trees, the field defined by the frame of the central panel, and that inscribed in the aquatic doorway inside the lower register of this panel, furthering my earlier simile of the *mis-en-abîme* (Figs. 2 and 5). The largest area in this concentric ternary scheme, the one defined by the pairs of trees, is open to the sky, just as the uppermost tier of the three superimposed quadrupeds in the side panels is also not marked by a horizontal element, even though the idea of a register defined by the figure of the top quadruped is visually understood.

The triple division of the superimposed quadrupeds corresponds in total height to that of the central frame. The same vertical dimension is divided into two in the case of the central panel, and into three in the case of the lateral panels, an observation Margueron's analysis hints at but does not spell out.

What the central panel expresses along the binary relationship between the subterranean Apsû and Ishtar's heaven, the lateral panels convey along a ternary gradation, expressed through the differing terrestrial and celestial natures of the quadrupeds as one moves from bottom to top.

The bottom register of the lateral panels features a wingless bull, which may be human-headed, although this is not certain.⁷³ It is shown with one of its hooves touching a roughly triangular mound rendered with the mountain scale pattern. This pattern denotes mountain or mountainous landscape in the art of ancient Mesopotamia, but it also evokes the pictographic prototype of the cuneiform sign for the Sumerian word *kur*, meaning earth, mountain, or the netherworld.⁷⁴ The terrestrial implications of this register are obvious. In the middle register, we see a winged bird-headed quadruped, a griffin if the quadruped is a lion, touching one of its forelegs to the trunk of the tree ahead of it. This winged, bird-headed creature is certainly capable of flight in contrast to the terrestrial wingless bull. Because of the natural association of birds with trees, its contact with the tree strengthens this creature's belonging to an intermediate domain between the surface of the earth and the far open skies, where the trees cannot reach. The top register shows a winged human-headed quadruped, a sphinx if the quadruped is a lion, not touching anything specific. Its being winged and human-headed makes it a less plausibly natural creature than a winged bird-headed quadruped, only by degree, since both creatures are after all fantastic. The human-headedness of this uppermost winged quadruped, however, imparts on it an enhanced degree of *numen*, making it an almost "angelic" creature that belongs to a higher heaven than that occupied by its bird-headed counterpart. Its not touching anything, coupled with its not being confined above by another ground line, is an indication of its greater ethereality compared to the bird-headed creature.

As far as wingedness is concerned, we observe from top to bottom the sequence: wing, wing, no wing; and as far as touching an element of the panels goes, we observe from top to bottom: no touch, touch, touch. It is only the intermediate quadruped that fulfills both parameters, "wing" and "touch," and has in this regard a truly mediating quality. This intermediate quadruped is the only one in the series with a disk rendered with swirling radials inside the curve of its tail. This element is of roughly the same size as each of the spirals of the outer frame of the painting, suggesting an affinity between this intermediate level of the triple division of the lateral panels and the band of running spirals, whose mediating quality I discuss in [Chapter 4](#).

Despite its enhanced *numen* and ethereality, the uppermost quadruped is by no means the equivalent of Ishtar's heaven in the top register of the central frame, whose upper limit the figure of the quadruped does reach visually, with the sky open above it ([Figs. 2 and 5](#)). After all, an "angelic" being is not

at the same level as a celestial deity. It is as though there were more distance to travel upward in the lateral panels to reach a level corresponding to that of Ishtar, perhaps signaled by the openness of the field above the top quadruped. This additional distance, however, is left insuperable and indeterminate in the painting, with the sky above the top quadruped extending indefinitely, and perhaps infinitely, upward within the picture plane. Even though two systems of gradation, binary in the case of the central panel, and ternary in the case of the lateral ones, are visually set in apposition, they represent not fully corresponding orders or systems.

THE BLUE BIRD IN FLIGHT: THE "PHOENIX"?

This unresolved dimension in the lateral panels and the field above them is enhanced by the indeterminate disposition of the blue bird whose species remains unclear (Figs. 2, 5, and 28).⁷⁵ Overlapping the date palm to the far right, the bird is not perched on it. It is captured in flight, but it is not clear where exactly the bird is headed, except vaguely toward the left. There is something open ended about the outer scene as well, especially in its upper field, paralleling what I have referred to as the magical quality of the lower register of the



28. Detail of the "investiture" painting from Mari, copy of Jean Lauffray, showing the blue bird in the upper right hand side of the composition. After Parrot, "Peintures du palais de Mari," pl. XXXIX.

central panel. So powerful is the semiotic effect of this bird that it would be weakened, were there an exactly symmetrical pendant to it on the other side of the painting, which is not preserved.

It is clear from what remains of the painting that the composition was predominantly symmetrical, and one might inevitably ask why the blue bird in flight should not have had its symmetrical counterpart on the left hand side. However, it is also important to note that with the presence of a left-hand-side bird, the degree of symmetry in the painting would be unrelenting and perhaps counter-intuitive within the compositional rubrics both of the painting itself and the artistic traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean and Near East at large. This is a parameter to reckon with in analyzing such an important work of art as the “investiture” painting; it cannot be so easily dismissed on the grounds of matters of preservation alone. Indeed, all symmetrical elements of the Mari design are of the static and hieratic type, with the only relatively more dynamic and mobile component being the blue bird. In the end, admittedly, any discussion concentrating on the uniqueness of this bird must remain speculative. However, such speculation is well worth pursuing in light of the present commitment to probe elements of the art of ancient Mesopotamia that have so far not been detected or investigated.

Thus, it is tempting to think of the bird as unique, perhaps the representation of a phoenix-like bird connected with the proposed main themes of the painting, renewal and ascent. If the bird were a unique mythological being or a symbol, it would make sense for it to be all by itself in the composition without a symmetrical counterpart. The mythical bird known in the ancient Greek tradition as the phoenix (φοινίξ) has its roots in ancient Egypt, where it is called *bnw*. In Egypt, the bird is identified with the heron and associated with renewal and large cycles or periods of time.⁷⁶ It is also especially linked with the annual Nile inundation, heralding with its appearance the end of the flood by alighting a tree or mound, and a new period of fertility and abundance.⁷⁷ In addition to the heron, the Egyptian phoenix is also comparable to other strongly flying birds of religious importance in the Nile Valley, such as the celestial Horus in the form of a falcon and the vulture.⁷⁸ Linked with the age-old solar cult at Heliopolis, the Egyptian phoenix declares the destiny of the world, “past and to come.”⁷⁹ Originating from an exotic or fantastic land such as Punt, the phoenix is associated with notions of periods of time, eternity, rebirth, flight to heaven or apotheosis, and universal destiny; all concepts I propose here for approaching the meaning of the Mari painting.

On account of its intercultural connections encompassing both the Aegean and Egypt, Mari is in one of the best geographic positions for Egyptian and Western Asian traditions to have converged. R. T. Rundle Clark points out the “remarkable fact that the cult of the *Bn.w* [phoenix] was especially prominent along the North-east border of Egypt, i.e. where the Egyptians come into

direct contact with the Asiatic peoples.”⁸⁰ It is possible that the blue bird in the painting is a reference to a messenger or “angelic” being *like* the phoenix of ancient Egyptian antiquity, announcing the beginning of a new era, perhaps in this case one that has universal regal implications by virtue of the royal imagery at the heart of the composition.⁸¹

It is noteworthy that birds, the dove, the raven, and the swallow, are all associated with the end of the cataclysmic Flood in both the biblical and Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh* narratives of the Deluge in ancient Western Asia. In the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh*, the Flood Hero initially releases a dove, then a swallow, both of which return without finding a perch, and finally a raven, which does not return, heralding the definitive recession of the Flood.⁸² As such, these birds, too, especially the one that does not return, are harbingers of the beginning of a new era. In this regard, the Mari bird, without necessarily being identified rigidly with any of these specific birds or a clearly defined mythological narrative, may be of crucial relevance to a reading of the painting in light of the paradigms offered by the ancient Mesopotamian Flood myth, as conducted in the [following chapter](#). The Mari bird need not be in any species-oriented relationship with the heron, the eagle, the falcon, the dove, the raven, or the swallow for it to fulfill the exemplar of a bird that is the harbinger of auspiciousness at the macro-cosmic level within the symbolism of the “investiture” painting. The meaning of this bird deserves further scrutiny in relation to other representations of mythical or powerful natural birds in the art of ancient Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Egypt, which would necessitate its own study and goes beyond the scope of the present book.

The Mari bird may also be an element of shamanic lore in the painting, as may also be the strongly flying emblematic birds of ancient Egyptian religion and art. The animal most closely associated with the shaman is the bird, an animal symbolic of flight to the other world, which the shaman imitates by means of a transformative costume.⁸³ In the ancient Egyptian royal “funerary” religion as well, as expressed by Rundle Clark:

[t]he power of the soul of the deceased to fly away from the tomb to the sky and to cross over to the land of immortality is reinforced in the *Pyramid Texts* by comparing the flight of the soul bird with that of various strongly flying birds or even by assuming that the soul assumes the role of one of these creatures.⁸⁴

In the final analysis, side by side with the running spirals, the bird is an element speaking to the intercultural connections of the art of Old Babylonian Mari, both semantically and stylistically. Such naturalistic depictions are especially at home in the artistic traditions of the Aegean and Egypt.⁸⁵ If, as I speculate, the bird is unique, with its relative scale, it would

also constitute the most extreme instance of deviation from absolute symmetry found in the painting.

The affinity between the lower register of the central panel and the outer scene, especially its upper field, in terms of their shared semiotic indeterminacy once again brings to the fore the top register of the central panel as the only systematically and semantically determinate area of the painting (Figs. 2, 5, and 7). Just as the void of the inner aquatic rectangle extends inward *ad infinitum*, so does the outer field upward. I would posit that what we see in the outer scene is a translation into a garden or landscape form of the magical qualities of the lower register of the central panel expressed in aquatic and piscine form. Elements of determinateness belonging to the top register of the central panel do have their presence in and impact on the composition of the outer scene. Placed adjacent to the vertical edges of the picture plane are two additional Lama goddesses (Figs. 2 and 7). Beyond the goddesses is a repetition, in three vertical bands only, of the frame system of the central panel of the painting consisting of bands of color, preserved, however, only on the right hand side. If the vertical bands had their counterparts on the other side, it is as if these two features of the central panel, the goddesses and elements of the frame, had emanated outward from the focus of the painting to hold the composition together only on the two vertical sides, leaving its upper field free and open to the sky. The dynamic disposition of the blue bird enhances this openness.

ASCENT TO HEAVEN

The arboreal elements of the outer landscape are also integral aspects of the symbolism of the painting. Here we see a duality in the kind of trees. The outer are fruit-bearing date palms, the inner ones representatives of a botanically unidentified species, in great likelihood a fantastic conception. While the natural date palms are on the farther edges of the scene, the fantastic trees are much closer to the hieratic focus of the painting. The landscape defined by the pairs of trees is a formal one; the three superimposed tiers of mythical quadrupeds are confined to the area defined by the pair of trees. As such, the floor-like linear elements, on which the two upper quadrupeds stand, are stretched between the trees only. At the same time, what imparts on the outer scene the quality of a natural landscape is again its upper field. The voids here are suggestive of air or the sky, and the blue bird, no matter how incommensurate in scale with the trees, is suggestive of movement therein.

The combination of the natural and fantastic in the configuration of the trees in the painting may be thought to point to the liminal nature of this landscape. This landscape does not belong to ordinary space and time. But it also does have some connection with the natural earth and the mundane,

as shown by the fruit-bearing date palms and the date gatherers tied to their trunks from their waists, as is common practice even in modern times in southern Iraq.⁸⁶ This liminal quality of the landscape may be compared to that of the Apsû, since it, too, is an occluded realm ordinarily out of reach, but still part of the earth. If the lower register of the central panel is a representation of the Apsû, then the element of the plant that is part of the flowing vase points to a vegetal, in addition to aquatic, component in the representation of this realm. The landscape of the outer scene could then be thought of as the materialization in much grander scale of the vegetal, or arboreal, component of the Apsû.

An aquatic element is not absent from the outer scene and its landscape either. As Barrelet proposed, the band of running spirals surrounding the entire composition may have aquatic symbolism.⁸⁷ It is not uncommon in ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian representational systems to superimpose an elevation or profile view of figures in an enclosure on a view in plan of that enclosure. The band of running spirals framing the outer scene may well be thought of on the analogy of a stream of water surrounding a garden.⁸⁸ While the streams of the flowing vase may be understood as water in the figural mode, the running spirals of the outer frame may be understood as water in the ornamental mode (Figs. 2, 5, and 7).

The distinction between a figural and ornamental mode in the representation of water in the painting must also point to a difference in the attributes of water expressed in each instance. Whereas the figural streams denote more directly a definite aquatic environment of a supernatural character, the ornamental mode refers to an aquatic principle permeating or surrounding the cosmos, a source of regeneration and an all-encircling boundary. Just as the lower register of the central panel, the aquatic Apsû, establishes the foundation and support for a graded ascent to the celestial domain of Ishtar through the conceptual stairway, so does the arboreal manifestation of the Apsû in the outer scene signal an analogous process of ascent through the tiers of the quadrupeds it holds together. With an almost structural link established by the horizontal tiers, the pair of trees is again a diagrammatic unit in laying out the principles of the ternary gradation analyzed above (Figs. 2 and 5).

In light of the presence of two different systems of gradation along the vertical at work here, while the medium of ascent from the foundation established by the Apsû to Ishtar's heaven in the central panel, the horizontal bands, is like a solid stairway; the medium of ascent in the lateral panels is like a ladder constituted by the trees and the ground lines that connect them as if they were rungs. A ladder is an object very different from a solid stairway, but the purpose behind both climbing tools is ultimately the same. In holding together the stairs and the rungs, the lower register of the central panel and the upright trees, respectively, may once again be viewed as one another's semantic

equivalents. They may both be seen as representations of the Apsû as an intermediate domain in supporting and enabling ascent.

This mediating capacity of the Apsû should be seen in its being connected to the earth at large and constituting a realm that is divine and supernatural, without being on a par with the celestial community of the gods. If we look at the ternary gradation of the lateral panels from this perspective, we see the intermediate tier with its bird-headed winged quadruped in such a mediating role between the earthbound bull and the human-headed numinous creature that marks the beginning of the heaven stretching indefinitely above it (Figs. 2 and 5). By touching one of the trees, notably the fantastic one, this intermediate quadruped reveals its affinity to the Apsû in its arboreal manifestation. By featuring a disk with swirling radials inside the curve of its tail, it reveals the same affinity with the alternative aquatic manifestation of the Apsû in the ornamental mode, found in the frame of the running spirals.

COLORISTIC SYMBOLISM

Each of the elements of the ternary gradation of the lateral panels may have corresponded to a distinctive aspect of the cosmos and the divine as perceived in Old Babylonian Mari.⁸⁹ A ternary division of both the earth and heaven in Babylonian cosmography is the case in first-millennium BCE texts, pointing at least to the fact that such a configuration is at home in ancient Mesopotamian thought, and could predate the first millennium BCE.⁹⁰ In his discussion of the identity of the stones that constitute the substance of the three heavens based on these texts, Wayne Horowitz indicates that the *luludānītu*-stone, of which the upper heaven is composed, is a reddish stone with white and black patches.⁹¹ The Middle Heaven is identified with the *saggilmud*-stone, which is a stone the same color as lapis lazuli.⁹² As for the Lower Heaven, it is composed of jasper, “a type of chalcedony, a hard, glassy, often translucent stone.”⁹³ The predominance of the colors red, white, and black in the concentric bands that establish the frame of the central panel of the “investiture” painting and the use of blue in the background especially of the “investiture” scene proper inside the central panel may be loaded with such coloristic symbolism that pertains to the geography of the ancient Mesopotamian heavens.

Especially the colors associated with the Upper Heaven, red, black, and white, are found not only in the bands of the central panel, but also in the wings and garments of the mythical figures inside and outside the panel, as if all together they signaled the highest heaven in the cosmological set-up of the composition. As for the background of the figural scenes preserved, there is a predominance of patches of blue, the color of the Middle Heaven, on account of its association with lapis lazuli. According to the Neo-Assyrian text KAR

307, the Middle Heaven contains the lapis lazuli cella of the ruler of the cosmos, Bel/Marduk, the successor of Enlil as lord.⁹⁴

A parallel interpretation of the basic coloristic scheme, or the traditional palette, of the ancient Mesopotamian painter, consisting of red, black, and white, comes from Charvát, who associates its occurrence on the Halaf-period (ca. 5600–5300 BCE) pottery from Tell Arpachiyah in northern Iraq with the same paradigms of cosmology, the uppermost heavens belonging to the god An and the *luludānītu*-stone that constitutes its substance.⁹⁵ Charvát boldly traces the veneration of the sky god An and the origins of ancient Mesopotamian cosmology to the Halaf period, seeing the three colors appearing frequently on the pottery as “a more widely conceived spiritual construct.”

If the notions expressed in first-millennium BCE texts can plausibly be seen to have relevance to the prehistoric pottery of ancient Mesopotamia, all the more reason to consider works of art of the second millennium BCE as part of such a continuum, rather than as chronologically divorced from any cultural aspect of the first millennium BCE, as though there were an impermeable wall between these two modern “millennial” formulations. As Horowitz aptly puts it, “in many respects, ancient Mesopotamian understandings of the universe remained remarkably constant over 2,500 years or so from the earliest evidence for cosmography in literary materials through the end of cuneiform writing.”⁹⁶ Indeed, the thirteenth-century BCE wall paintings from Kar Tukulti-Ninurta, too, feature the same traditional palette consisting of red, black, white, and blue, extending this coloristic spectrum from the Middle Bronze to the Late Bronze Age.

STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

The concept of a stairway or ladder reaching heaven is not absent in ancient Mesopotamian texts relating myths of ascent from the second half of the second millennium BCE and the first millennium BCE, especially the *Etana Epic*. In this poem, a ladder seems to be featured previous to Etana’s ascent to heaven.⁹⁷ References also exist in texts to the daily ascent of the sun god to heaven from the netherworld, in which the god climbs a stairway of lapis lazuli.⁹⁸ The image of a ladder as a medium of ascent can especially be seen in the ancient Egyptian *Pyramid Texts* from the Old Kingdom, relating in highly complex terms the rise of the king to the celestial realm for apotheosis.⁹⁹ Osiris as the god of the terrestrial beyond is especially active and effective in enabling this ascent, and in certain instances he himself is the one who ascends.¹⁰⁰ In noting the gradual ascent of the tribute processions to the presence of the Achaemenid Persian king in the reliefs lining the stairs at Persepolis, Root points out how the candidates for access to the Egyptian beyond climb a similar gently rising stairway to reach the presence of the god Osiris for judgment, as shown in the

wall paintings inside the tomb of Horemheb (Dynasty 18, 1323–1295 BCE) in the Valley of the Kings.¹⁰¹

Closer to home, the quintessential manifestation of the principle of a stairway and ascent to heaven in ancient Mesopotamia is the temple tower, the ziggurat, examples of which dominated the skylines of Babylonian and Assyrian cities from the third through the first millennia BCE, although Mari did not have one.¹⁰² Given its familiarity with and participation in the Babylonian cultural sphere, Mari's not having had a ziggurat should not constitute an impediment to the relevance of the symbolism of the stages of a ziggurat to the sense of linear gradation found in the composition of the "investiture" painting. With their different levels, possibly featuring different colors, the ziggurats were perhaps the most enduring manifestation in ancient Mesopotamia of a principle or process of ascent to heaven within a meaningful system of gradation across the cosmos.¹⁰³

The following chapter focuses in greater detail on the terrestrial background of ascent to heaven, or apotheosis, as possibly expressed in ancient Mesopotamian art and thought. It sustains the focus on the Mari painting, and offers a reading of its composition and imagery against the backdrop of the Babylonian Flood narratives as paradigms for the establishment of terrestrial realms of longevity and immortality as well as those for sacral time and eternity. To that end, it attempts to further the discussion conducted here regarding the priestly "investiture" of the Mari king as an epitome of immortalization or apotheosis.

THREE

THE FLOOD MYTH AS PARADIGM

In India, as elsewhere, one must often abandon one's attempt to determine among the attested versions of a mythical narrative the one from which all the others, whether contemporary or later, have supposedly derived. Even from the most ancient times variants have existed, each as legitimate as the next.

Georges Dumézil, *The Destiny of the Warrior*.¹

The Babylonian Flood story is the only mythical account in ancient Mesopotamian culture about a radical renewal of a world order already in existence, resulting in the immortalization of its human protagonist. It is also the only mythical account from ancient Mesopotamia that depicts a paradisiac locale of immortalization. Renewal in the Flood story takes place as a result of the total destruction of the old world order, with the kernel of a pristine cosmos preserved inside the boat the Flood Hero builds to survive this aquatic cataclysm. Here, I refer to this boat as the ark, a term I use in its simple sense, with no intention to emphasize links with the Bible and Noah.

In the “classical” Flood narratives of the Old Babylonian period, while it is the ruler god Enlil who tries to destroy humanity on account of the nuisance it has caused for the gods, it is the god of wisdom and magic and lord of the Apsû, Enki/Ea, who instructs one representative of humanity, the Flood Hero, to build a boat in order to escape the Flood, the final catastrophe inflicted by Enlil on mankind in a chain of attempts at destruction.² The story is found, albeit incompletely, in two texts from the Old Babylonian period, the *Poem of*

Atra-ḥašis, in Akkadian, and the *Sumerian Flood Story*, in Sumerian. In the former, the Flood Hero is called Atrahasis, in the latter, Ziusudra.

As indicated in [Chapter 1](#), the Old Babylonian version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* also contains the character of the Flood Hero, named Utnapishtim, although a narrative of the Flood story belonging to this text has not come to light. The Standard Babylonian version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* from the Neo-Assyrian period, in turn, contains the most complete Flood story from ancient Mesopotamia.³ In the present framework, I adopt an integral approach to the treatment of these texts in an analysis of the “investiture” painting, whereby references to the much later but more complete Flood narrative in the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh* concentrate on, but are not restricted to, its aspects that have their clear counterparts in the earlier Old Babylonian Flood narratives.

A NOTE ON METHOD

One might ask what the Mari painting has to do with the Flood story. Both the painting and the myth are too familiar to the scholar of the ancient Near East. A connection between them, so far not drawn, may easily strike one as off the wall. On the one hand, the Flood story generates a range of presumptions and prejudices, both because of its biblical repercussions and its contemporary impact on popular consciousness, including all kinds of eccentric views, with the physical search for Noah’s ark still continuing. On the other hand, the study of the kingdom and site of Mari is a highly specialized academic matter, a full-fledged sub-field within the study of the ancient Near East. The copious archive of the Old Babylonian palace and the extensive archaeological remains of the site have generated voluminous scholarship.

Despite extensive documentation of the site of Mari and its socio-political and economic affairs especially in the early eighteenth century BCE, its art is still poorly understood.⁴ With its visual vocabulary paralleling the iconographic repertoires of ancient Mesopotamian works of art before and after it and resonating with conceptions of paradise, immortality, and ascent, the “investiture” painting would be scrutinized most fruitfully within the continuum of the visual language of the ancient Near East and its metaphysics. As such, the themes of the Mari painting, renewal, a paradisiac garden, the flowing vase as a symbol of passage or access to a terrestrial realm of purity, all set within a macro-cosmic environment of hierarchy, are directly evocative of the deeper message of the ancient Mesopotamian Flood myth, the (re)creation of a pristine terrestrial land and its human but immortal inhabitant.

Annus has posited that the survivors in the ancient Mesopotamian Flood stories are always kings such as Ziusudra, Atrahasis, and Utnapishtim.⁵ According to Annus, the persons who mastered the Flood by surviving it were demigods

and bearers of antediluvian wisdom.⁶ In his recent work, Irving Finkel, however, has stated that even though the Sumerian Ziusudra was a “priest-king,” neither Atrahasis nor Utnapishtim is referred to as a king in the relevant texts in Akkadian, and that there is no reason to think that they were.⁷ Finkel, however, passes over Ziusudra’s identity as king quite lightly, as the *Sumerian Flood Story* (v. 145), a major text of the ancient Mesopotamian Flood repertoire, explicitly refers to him as lugal, king in Sumerian.⁸ Furthermore, Utnapishtim is the Akkadian rendition of the Sumerian name Ziusudra.⁹ In the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh*, Utnapishtim is addressed as the “son of Ubar-Tutu,” the king of Shuruppak, the last of the five antediluvian cities of Babylonia before the Flood strikes, according to the *Sumerian King List* (vv. 30–35).¹⁰ As the son of the last antediluvian king and the one who experiences and survives the Deluge, Utnapishtim is clearly of the royal line, even though his reign seems not to come to fruition on account of the Flood catastrophe.

Even the lack of the designation “king” in the extant parts of the *Poem of Atra-ḥa-sis* may not be enough to brush aside implications of kingship from this text, since in the poem Atrahasis is capable of summoning the elders of his community and making declarations to them regarding his decision to leave their city to join Enki/Ea in his subterranean abode, as quoted in full further below. In this respect, Atrahasis is at least a personage of importance and influence in his polity. Last but not least, the *Sumerian King List* itself is as much about kingship as it is about history, and it features the Flood as the principal turning point in its chronological configuration. Thus, it is reasonably sound to think of ancient Mesopotamian Flood traditions as closely linked with the ideology of kingship. The kind of kingship referenced by the Flood mythology, however, is not a typical mode of rule, but a supra-political understanding of kingship, whereby its possessor had certain intellectual and spiritual powers not accessible to his community or ordinary humanity, as Annus has observed.¹¹ The royal ideologies of the ancient Near East expressed precisely this kind of kingship through the image of the king in their regal art, whether or not the actual personal qualities of the king as a human being in a particular state during a particular era warranted it.¹²

THE IDEAL ENCLOSURE AND THE IDEAL GARDEN

In addition to the motif of the flowing vase, there are two major themes in the Flood story that call for a consideration of certain elements of the Mari painting in light of the paradigms they offer. The first is the presence of a hermetically sealed capsule, the boat built by the Flood Hero, an enclosure evocative of the Apsû, in which the seeds of a new world order are embedded. This aspect of the Flood myth parallels the semantics of the central rectangular enclosure of the painting (Figs. 2, 5, and 7). The second is the reference to a faraway land

of immortality, where the Flood Hero is placed in the aftermath of the Flood, a land that is clearly part of the earth but also magical in essence, co-extensive with, or in close spatial proximity to, the Apsû, the Dilmun of the *Sumerian Flood Story*. As for this aspect of the Flood story, it resonates with what I have referred to as the arboreal incarnation of the Apsû outside the central panel of the Mari painting.

While the construction of the boat under instructions from Enki/Ea is clear in the *Poem of Atra-ḫasīs*, the immortalization of the Flood Hero and his placement in Dilmun in the distant East is clear in the *Sumerian Flood Story*. The relevant passages from both texts, followed by their counterparts in the Standard Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, are well worth quoting in translation. In the *Poem of Atra-ḫasīs*, the god Enki/Ea speaks to Atrahasis: “Destroy your house, build a boat, / Spurn property and save life / The boat which you build / ...] be equal [(...)].”¹³ It is a pity that the description of the boat is missing here, but when the text resumes, we read: “Roof it over like the Apsû / So that the sun shall not see inside it / Let it be roofed over above and below.”¹⁴ Before embarking on the ark, Atrahasis tells the elders of his community: “My god [does not agree] with your god, / Enki and [Enlil] are angry with one another. / They have expelled me from [my house(?)], / Since I reverence [Enki], / ... / I can[not] live in [your...], / I cannot [set my feet on] the earth of Enlil.”¹⁵ The phrase “[r]oof it over like the Apsû” suggests an affinity between the structure being constructed under Enki/Ea’s instructions and the god’s own abode, both sealed enclosures into which sunlight cannot penetrate. This statement cannot be a fortuitous simile. The speaker is Ea and part of the instructions he gives for the construction of the ark evokes the design of his own sacred enclosure.¹⁶

The parallel passages from the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh* read: Enki/Ea speaks to Utnapishtim: “O man of Shuruppak, son of Ubar-Tutu, / demolish the house, build a boat! / Abandon riches and seek survival! / Spurn property and save life!’ ... The boat that you are going to build, / ... / cover her with a roof, like the Apsû.”¹⁷ ...”Then also you will say to them [the elders] as follows: / ‘For sure Enlil has conceived a hatred of me! / I cannot dwell in your city! / I cannot tread [on] Enlil’s ground! / [I shall] go down to the Apsû, to live with Ea, my master; / he will rain down on you plenty! / [An abundance] of birds, a riddle of fishes! / [...]...riches (at) harvest-time! / In the morning he will rain down on you bread-cakes, / in the evening, a torrent of wheat.”¹⁸

In both the *Poem of Atra-ḫasīs* and the *Gilgamesh* passages quoted above, by embarking on the boat, the Flood Hero enters the magical domain of Enki/Ea to be preserved from destruction and eventually immortalized. In the Mari painting, the bottom register of the central panel, especially with its aquatic doorway, reflects this condition of entering an aquatic environment

that is effective during a process of purification and renewal. In the Flood story, the period spent in the boat is also such a transitional or intermediate process that results in the immortalization of the Flood Hero after the Flood has receded.

Regarding the immortalization of the Flood Hero in the aftermath of the Flood, we find the following verses in the *Sumerian Flood Story*: “The king Ziusudra / Prostrated himself before An (and) Enlil ... (who) gave him life, like a god, / Elevated him to eternal life, like a god. / At that time, the king Ziusudra / who protected the seed of mankind at the time(?) of destruction, / They settled in an overseas country, in the orient, in Dilmun.”¹⁹ The parallel passage in the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh* reads: “Enlil came up into the boat, / he took hold of my hand and brought me out / He brought out my woman, he made her kneel at my side, / he touched our foreheads, standing between us to bless us: / ‘In the past Uta-napishti was (one of) mankind, / but now Uta-napishti and his woman shall be like us gods! / Uta-napishti shall dwell far away, at the mouth of the rivers!”²⁰

In a parallel reading of the elements of the Mari painting against the conceptual backdrop offered by these passages, one could ask if the upper register of the central panel corresponds, by analogy, to the immortalization of the Flood Hero by the gods governing the cosmos after his emergence from the boat. Such an implication is very much there, but I have proposed to understand the upper register as a celestial domain presided over by Ishtar, and the act depicted as one that amounts to apotheosis, or divinization. In the Flood myth, by contrast, the Flood Hero is placed after the Deluge in a liminal terrestrial domain in an equally liminal status through his immortalization in human form without apotheosis.

The Flood Hero certainly does not ascend to heaven. Instead, he is placed apart from ordinary humanity in a faraway terrestrial location for an indefinite period of time. In other words, it is as if he made a transition from one form of the Apsû, the sealed enclosure of the boat, to another, its paradisiac incarnation on the surface of the earth. Here he is to remain immortal indefinitely. Thus, there is something open ended, unfulfilled, and indeterminate about his position. One inevitably asks how long he would remain in this state in this location, and whether at some point in the distant future he would be released from this condition to join the divine sphere in the proper sense of the word apotheosis.

In the historical Judeo-Christian tradition, paradise was thought to exist “as a place where the just awaited resurrection and final judgment, which was thought to be close at hand.”²¹ There were divergent opinions as to its exact location. On the one hand, it was thought to be located “in a remote part of the earth, preserved in its original state, but become inaccessible.”²² On the other hand, as expressed by Jean Delumeau:

paradise had been removed from our earth and transported to heaven or, more exactly, to the “third heaven” to which St. Paul was caught up and that was not to be confused with the “seventh heaven” of eternal happiness and beatific vision. In this place of waiting, ... two persons in particular were dwelling: Enoch and Elijah, both of whom had been removed from the sight of the living without passing through death.²³

As stated further by Delumeau, “in the church of the early centuries paradise does not yet mean ... the ‘kingdom of heaven,’ as it will later on.”²⁴ This liminal configuration of paradise is parallel to ancient Near Eastern manifestations of an intermediate locale of blessedness and longevity, conveyed by the aquatic and vegetal elements of the Mari painting, rather than a state of transcendent eternity and divinity, expressed instead in the Mari painting by the encounter between the king and the goddess Ishtar.

The liminal state of the Flood Hero is in greater harmony, again by analogy, with the indeterminate visual mode found in the Mari painting than it is with the scene of encounter between the Mari king and Ishtar. The indeterminate mode is especially prevalent in the lateral panels of the outer landscape, with their implying the beginning of a process of ascent that is not carried through its climax, as discussed in the [previous chapter](#) (Figs. 2 and 5). In the aftermath of the Flood, the Flood Hero might as well have been fully divinized and taken to the sky, like the ancient Egyptian king of the *Pyramid Texts*, as the promise may very much be there, albeit suppressed.²⁵ It is the fulfillment of such a potential of ascent and divinization that the upper register of the central panel of the Mari painting shows, expressed through the ring and rod and Ishtar as the lady of heaven. Implications of a process of renewal and the resultant state of immortalization, in turn, are rather embedded in the lower register of the central panel and the outer scene, with the upper representing a state that is even beyond immortalization, apotheosis. The central panel as a whole is then the synopsis of an entire metaphysical process. This process, in its two stages, is visually set within an enclosure modeled after the Apsû, just as the ark, a construction also like the Apsû, is the physical link in the Flood story between a primeval era and a future world order, containing elements of both.

THE IDEAL TEMPLE

There is a close affinity between the Apsû and the ark of the Flood stories on the one hand, and between the latter and the archetypal ancient Mesopotamian temple on the other, as pointed out in a compelling way by Steven W. Holloway.²⁶ It is a pity that no complete description of the boat built by the Flood Hero exists in the *Poem of Atra-ḫasīs*. The recently discovered Old Babylonian *Ark Tablet*, quoted below, however, fills an important gap in this regard.²⁷ As Lambert and Millard state, the Old Babylonian *Poem of Atra-ḫasīs*

does not feature the “midrashic elaboration of Gilgameš XI, where the boat is a veritable Titanic with six floors.”²⁸ In light of the parallelism between the basic elements of the Flood narratives in the Old Babylonian and Standard Babylonian texts quoted above, however, one cannot ignore the description of the Flood Hero’s boat preserved in the later Gilgamesh text in probing the nature of ideal or cosmic enclosures in ancient Mesopotamia as represented in both text and image.

According to Holloway, the ark described in the Flood story in the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh* is no simple boat, but an archetypal structure or enclosure, such as the Etemenanki, the ziggurat of Babylon.²⁹ In a discussion of the analogy between the ark and the temple in ancient Mesopotamian and biblical traditions, Holloway views the textual description of the ark in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* as in harmony with the principles of composition belonging to this ziggurat as described in the so-called Esagila Tablet from the Seleucid period (312–138 BCE), which specifies the height, length, and breadth of the ziggurat as equal.³⁰ In the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh*, the Flood Hero, Utnapishtim, describes the ark: “one acre was her area, ten rods each her sides stood high, / ten rods each, the edges of her top were equal / I set in place her body, I drew up her design: / I gave her six decks, / I divided her into seven parts. / I divided her interior into nine.”³¹

As already noted by scholars, this description of the Flood Hero’s boat indicates that the structure is a cube divided into seven compartments by means of six decks, with a further division of the interior space into nine, the exact nature of which is not entirely clear.³² Thus, the ark is of an ideal geometric form incorporating ideal numerological symbolism. The ideal, hence unrealistic, nature of the form of the ark can also be detected in the passage from the Old Babylonian *Atra-ḫasīs* quoted above in which one of the instructions for the construction includes “roofing it over both above and below (*eliš u šapliš*).” Ordinarily, a roof covers only the upper part of a structure, whereas the text blurs the usual distinction between above and below, drawing attention to the supernatural qualities of the ark.

The recently discovered Old Babylonian *Ark Tablet*, too, not only parallels the rhetorical aspects of the *Atra-ḫasīs* and *Gilgamesh* passages, but also prescribes an ideal design for the ark, whose scheme is to be drawn in a circular plan, with equal length and breadth. In this text, even though not specified, the speaker is again in great likelihood Ea: “Wall, wall! Reed wall, reed wall! / Atra-ḫasīs, pay heed to my advice, / That you may live forever! / Destroy your house, build a boat; / Spurn property and save life! / Draw out the boat that you will make / On a circular plan (*ešerti kippatim*); / Let her length and breadth be equal, / Let her floor area be one field, let her sides be one *nindan* high.”³³ Finkel, who published this text for the first time, makes much of the mention of a circular plan in the description of the vessel, arguing that the Old

Babylonian ark was a coracle.³⁴ He understands the specifications in the text for the equality of the length and breadth of the structure as a stylized expression of circularity as well, the way a god would note the characteristics of a circle.³⁵ On the basis of the occurrence of the word *kippatu*, meaning circle or circumference, in the *Gilgamesh* text, translated by A. R. George as “area” (“one acre was her area, ten rods each her sides stood high”), as well, Finkel argues that underlying even the ark described in the *Gilgamesh* text is a round scheme, the cubic and multi-tier configurations being the result of the much later “midrashic” elaboration of this “iconic vessel.”³⁶

Without intervening in a discussion on the shape of the ark of the ancient Mesopotamian Flood traditions, I would again observe the highly conceptual, almost esoteric, nature of these descriptions. In the Old Babylonian *Ark Tablet*, the lines “[d]raw out the boat that you will make / on a circular plan (*eṣerti kippatim*)” may not unequivocally mean “make the boat circular in shape.” Furthermore, the mention of a circular plan along with equality of length and breadth may be comparable to the idealism of roofing a structure both above and below, an inherently impossible configuration within realistic parameters. The *Ark Tablet* is further revealing in its spelling out the phenomenon of immortalization integral to Flood narratives at the outset: “Atra-ḫašīs, pay heed to my advice, / *That you may live forever (tabālluṭ dāriš)*! (my emphasis),” a phrase lacking in the extant *Atra-ḫašīs* and *Gilgamesh* texts.

In light of the variety of ideal or archetypal forms that the ark or the temple may draw upon in the ancient Mesopotamian textual record, the entirety of the central enclosure of the “investiture” painting can be considered as such an ideal enclosure. This structure contains in it the kernel of a new world order modeled after the primordial cosmos represented by the Apsû, which it encompasses most conspicuously in its lower register (Figs. 2, 5, and 7). The central enclosure of the Mari painting is certainly not a figural depiction of the boat built by the Flood Hero, nor is the painting as a whole the visual narrative of the Babylonian Flood story. But with its multiple bands of frame incorporating the numbers six and seven, the central panel should be considered as an ideal enclosure with a cosmological symbolism like the ark, as described basically in the Old Babylonian texts but in much greater elaboration in the Standard Babylonian account of the Flood story.

NUMEROLOGICAL SYMBOLISM

The numbers six and seven, which characterize the internal division of the structure of the ark in the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh* text, also occur in the description of the duration of the Flood both in the latter and the *Poem of Atra-ḫašīs*.³⁷ In *Atra-ḫašīs*, we find the following verses: “For seven days and seven nights / Came the deluge, the storm, [the flood].”³⁸ As for the *Gilgamesh*

text, we read: “For six days and seven nights, / was blowing the wind, the downpour, the gale, the Deluge [laying flat the land] / When the seventh day arrived, / the gale relented, [...] / The sea grew calm.”³⁹

Along similar numerological lines, Horowitz states that there existed a tradition of seven heavens and seven earths “in the Near East during the later part of the first millennium B.C.E. and the first millennium C.E.,” mentioning contemporary Hebrew and Arabic texts, such as the Hebrew *Book of Enoch* and the Koran, which “present cosmographies in which seven heavens and earths are explained in detail.”⁴⁰ According to Horowitz, a Sumerian conception of seven heavens may be inferred from certain incantations:

Despite the absence of direct evidence for seven superimposed heavens (an) and earths (ki) in Sumerian and Akkadian texts, indirect evidence for understanding [the Sumerian phrases] an.7 ki.7, an.7.bi ki.7.bi, and an.ki.7.bi.da as allusions to 14 cosmic regions is available. If the phrases in the incantations allude to multiple heavens and earths, then these incantations invoke heavens (an) and earths (ki) to cure a suppliant.⁴¹

Horowitz also notes a parallelism in construction between the phrases referring to the seven earths and seven heavens in the incantation texts and the phrase found in the *Sumerian Flood Story* referring to the seven days and nights that constitute the duration of the Flood, in a way pointing out how such numerological parallelism is not purely incidental.⁴² The numbers six and seven occur frequently in ancient Mesopotamian texts and thought, but often in a spatial, geometric, temporal, and hence cosmologically charged sense. The system of graded framing found in the Mari painting through its seven concentric linear elements defining six bands also communicates the temporal and spatial stages of a hieratic process such as ascent to heaven. This configuration is comparable to the Flood narratives’ depicting a spatial gradation and temporal sequence in the structural design of the ark and the duration of the Flood, respectively, in laying out a process of transition and restoration.

A NEW COSMIC ORDER

The fact that an ascent to heaven is not the case in the aftermath of the Deluge in the Flood myth indicates that the new status of the Flood Hero is liminal, somewhere between humanity and divinity, far away from both, but closer to the divine in its immortality. His new home is one in which the pristine and magical qualities of the antediluvian cosmos are maintained. This ideal land is conceived as Dilmun in the East in the *Sumerian Flood Story*, and as the “Mouth of the Rivers” (*pī nārātī*) in the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh*, both of which are associated with Enki/Ea and the Apsû itself.⁴³ By analogy, the outer scene of the Mari painting also implies the magical and liminal qualities

of an intermediate land of immortality, signaling through its visual elements the potential of further ascent, but also stretches temporally and spatially *ad infinitum* (Figs. 2 and 5).

The landscape in the painting may further be understood on the analogy of the fertility and abundance associated with the aftermath of the Flood in ancient Mesopotamian myth. In addition to its destructive impact, the Flood eventually purifies and initiates a new or “repristinated” world.⁴⁴ In the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh*, when the time comes for the Flood Hero to embark on the ark to escape the Flood, he is instructed by Enki/Ea to tell the elders of his city that he is going down to the Apsû to live with his master Ea, who will bring upon them a rain of plenty. This statement could not simply be an ordinary lie invented to deceive the fellow citizens of Utnapishtim and dispel attention from his hidden plan of escape. As stated rightly by Lambert and Millard in relation to the Old Babylonian *Poem of Atra-ḫasīs*, “Atra-ḫasīs now has to explain his actions to the elders. He told them *quite truthfully* that Enki and Enlil had fallen out, so he, a protégé of the former, could no longer live on the latter’s earth. He must, then, be off in his boat to live with his own god” (my emphasis).⁴⁵ In both texts, the Flood Hero’s statement is a parabolic or cryptic indication, if not an announcement, of what actually is about to happen, rather than words of trick and deceit. The Flood Hero may not be descending to the Apsû literally to live with Enki/Ea, but by embarking on the ark under the instructions of this god and staying enclosed in it throughout the duration of the Flood, he certainly leaves the domain of the god of the now expired world order, Enlil, and remains in an occluded environment like the Apsû under the aegis of his master Enki/Ea, lord of the Apsû, in preparation for the new circumstances.

The rain of plenty mentioned by the Flood Hero in the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh* must again be no simple verbal stratagem to give masses the impression that something good is coming and divert their attention from the impending disaster. Rather, it must be another cryptic indication for the ultimate purification and fertility that the Flood waters will bring the world after the destruction. The additional reference to birds, fishes, cakes, and wheat complements the emphasis on abundance. In fact, verses from the Sumerian poem *Enki and the World Order*, in which Enki characterizes his own bounty, are quite comparable: “When I approach heaven, a rain of abundance rains from heaven. When I approach earth, there is a high carp-flood. When I approach the green meadows, at my word stockpiles and stacks are accumulated.”⁴⁶ In the *Gilgamesh* passage, what on the literal level seem to be statements of favorable portents meant to deceive may in fact be loaded with truthful tropes crucial to the genuine meaning of the Flood story.⁴⁷

FLOOD VISION

The idea of an initiation in the Apsû below, followed by an encounter with divinity outside or above can be found in the myths of Ninurta and Adapa as well. In *Ninurta's Journey to Eridu* (I 8–23), Ninurta acquires the me's, the cosmic forces, in the Apsû at Eridu “in order to ensure abundance and fertility for Sumer.”⁴⁸ Fragment B (53') of the Adapa myth, discovered at Tell el-Amarna and dated to the fourteenth century BCE, depicts the sage Adapa plunging into the Apsû, where Enki/Ea gives him instructions for his visit to the heaven of Anu. In heaven, Adapa is offered the food of immortality, which he rejects; but he certainly accepts the garment put on him and the oil brought, with which he anoints himself.⁴⁹ Annus has pointed out that the epithet of the Old Babylonian Flood survivor, Atrahasis, meaning “exceedingly wise,” “is also an epithet of the sage Adapa in the Akkadian myth.”⁵⁰ Annus interprets Adapa's refusal of the “food of life” and the “water of life” as virtuous acts, in that the sage stays away from the “foodstuffs forbidden to humanity.” He sees Adapa's accepting the garment and ointment as the “main elements of assuming divinity,” which he compares to Enoch's transformation in heaven according to *2 Enoch* 9.17–19. The Enoch incident also involves garments and anointment with oil.⁵¹ In her study on “ascent apocalypses” of the ancient Jewish and Christian traditions, Martha Himmelfarb designates this Enochic episode as the “investiture” of a “heavenly priest,” especially by virtue of its including clothing and anointing.⁵²

If the upper register of the central panel of the Mari painting is a depiction of the king's assuming divinity as a result of the encounter with Ishtar and her conferring on him supra-royal insignia, the ring and rod, we come full circle to the question of investiture. Not being restricted to a technical definition of the term in its referring exclusively to the conferral on the king of the throne, the crown, and the scepter, as attested in the royal inscriptions of the Ur III and Isin periods, we may embrace in relation to the Mari painting its sense of the highest sacerdotal initiation of the royal figure, of which all enthronement and renewal of enthronement ceremonies in the ancient Near East must be considered reenactments.⁵³

Flood traditions, which were not monolithic in ancient Mesopotamia, are also associated with the heroic god Ninurta.⁵⁴ In *Lugal-e* (ll. 347–67), after having used the Flood as a destructive weapon, the god, connected with agriculture in addition to kingship, is described as gathering waters in one spot during the Flood and raising the vegetation in its aftermath.⁵⁵ In this epic poem in Sumerian (vv. 682–97), known from Old Babylonian tablets, after his heroic exploits, Ninurta, as if he were not already a god, is given “a celestial mace, a prosperous and unchanging rule, eternal life, the good

favour of Enlil ... and the strength of An” by his father Enlil,⁵⁶ all events evoked by the imagery of the upper register of the central panel of the “investiture” painting.

Thorkild Jacobsen reminds us that like Ninurta, Inanna, the Sumerian ancestress of Ishtar, too, presides over thunderstorms and rain that not only represent formidable destructive forces but also media of fertility and regeneration.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Jacobsen points out the lion as an attribute of thunder gods, again such as Ninurta, and the lion-headed “thunderbird” as a being controlled both by Inanna and Ninurta.⁵⁸ He also sees Inanna’s being a goddess of rain as a corollary of her identity as the lady or queen of heaven. Ishtar, in her incarnation as Belet-ili, the mistress of the gods, is also featured in the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh* as the divinity who had commanded the Flood in the assembly of the gods.⁵⁹ In sum, given the diversity and richness of the Flood traditions in ancient Mesopotamia, it would be appropriate to see Inanna/Ishtar as fully part of the rich milieu defined by this myth and its implications.

DEFINING PARADEIGMA

Even though Flood traditions in ancient Mesopotamia were diverse, they may all be thought to share a common paradigmatic basis, the renewal of the cosmic order and the immortalization of its chief royal protagonist in the aftermath of a cataclysmic ordeal.⁶⁰ As such, the Mari painting, too, bears a relation to the same paradigmatic background without necessarily being a depiction of any specific one of the extant Flood stories. It shows a renewed terrestrial domain teeming with fertility and abundance, with its foundation deep in the pristine source of the cosmos, the Apsû, and the pathway of further ascent to the state of ultimate divinity across the rising levels of the celestial realm plotted out.

A cogent definition of the notion of paradigm, *paradeigma* in Greek, and *exemplum* in Latin, can be found in Gregory Nagy’s work *Homeric Questions*, where Nagy posits that regardless of the presence of and differences among different versions of a myth featuring different characters and variations in plot, the paradigm behind the myth *per se* would be unchanging and universal. He points out that it is this unchanging aspect of a particular myth that possesses authority and the capability to instruct and illuminate.⁶¹ This definition of *paradeigma* should be applicable, by extension, to the relevance of mythical structures and the ideas embedded in them to images that do not necessarily depict episodes from clearly identifiable legends and sagas preserved in texts. In order to invoke the *paradigm* of the cosmic order and its periodic destruction and renewal in ancient Mesopotamia in the iconographic analysis of the “investiture” painting, we do not need to find Enlil, Ninurta, Utnapishtim, his wife, Ziusudra, a boat, or a figural Flood narrative identified step by step in its imagery. The paradigm offered by the myth would still be valid, authoritative,

and illuminating in understanding the image. Indeed, within ancient modes of visual communication, images may *be* that very paradigm pure and simple.⁶²

By the same token, conceptions of ascent evoked by the imagery of the painting would not be incompatible with the literal absence of ascent in the Flood accounts preserved from ancient Mesopotamia. With its description of the ark as a multi-tiered cosmic enclosure comparable to the ziggurat of Babylon, the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh* may already signal the Flood myth as the foundation to ascent to heaven. In addition to the mythical models of Etana and Adapa, the phenomenon of ascent to heaven is not absent in ancient Mesopotamian royal ideology. We find oblique references in the Ur III period and the Isin Dynasty to the ascent to heaven of deceased kings who were also deified during their lifetimes, Shulgi and Ishbi-Erra (2017–1985 BCE).⁶³ Regardless of whether or not the Mari king was deified, the “investiture” painting makes a powerful visual statement in laying out the complexity of a process of immortalization leading to ascent and apotheosis in a way in which no textual account from ancient Mesopotamia preserves.

Albeit presented in both ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia through funerary notions, the process of the royal ascent to heaven need not be understood in an exclusively post-mortem context. At another level, it may also characterize the experience of a special human being, always cast in the guise of the king in the ancient Near East, while still alive. As outlined in the [Introduction](#), this experience can be thought of as shamanic or mystical, since it entails an encounter with a formidable divine force or a visit to a divine realm within the confines of a human lifetime, with results affecting favorably the relevant individual’s ontological status both in life and at death, making him partake of the divine or immortal. This process should also be thought of as containing a series of stages or levels, again commensurate with the sense of stratified gradation permeating the Mari composition. The Flood myth provides the most relevant foundation in the textual domain for the analysis and discussion of the terrestrial or paradisiac component of this process, which is closely connected with the Apsû, both at the level of individual immortalization and at the level of the world order and its renewal.

THE MARI PAINTING AND THE ASSYRIAN “SACRED TREE”

An arboreal and aquatic manifestation of the principle of time and space represented by the Apsû and its relation to a celestial domain may also be found in the celebrated image of the Assyrian “sacred tree” behind the throne of Ashurnasirpal II in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud ([Fig. 3](#)).⁶⁴ Like the Mari painting, this image, too, is often understood as an expression of the Assyrian king’s relation to the state gods of his polity in enabling the prosperity of his land and the upholding of the cosmic order. A parallel

reading of this composition against the backdrop offered by the present discussion would help probe additional layers of meaning in this composition as well. Such an endeavor would prove the Mari painting itself as a *paradeigma* in constituting a prototype and precedent for the visual expression of a process of immortalization and ascent found in this equally potent image about a thousand years later. While they seem quite different at first sight, upon close analysis, the conceptual and structural affinities between the two compositions become clearer.

We have seen above the parallelism in key passages between the Flood accounts from the Old Babylonian period and those from the first-millennium BCE Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh*. Attention to an analogous continuity in the language of images would enable a better understanding of what we are so apt to consider as individual works of art isolated by space and time, only to be dealt with in their own spatial and temporal contexts. With their locations north of Babylonia, Old Babylonian Mari and the political center of the Neo-Assyrian Empire were both on territory open to ideas and exchanges from different directions, while being at the same time anchored in a by and large Babylonian cultural sphere.

The “investiture” painting, along with the other paintings unearthed in the palace at Mari, show that examples of monumental wall decoration in ancient Mesopotamia preceded the orthostat reliefs of the Neo-Assyrian palaces by at least one thousand years.⁶⁵ The palace establishment was the center of the intellectual life both in the kingdom of Mari and the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and there are noteworthy parallels in the architectural layout of the palace structures. In both, we see principles of planning centered on two courtyards, in one of which was nestled the throne room suite, as well as the presence of a visual program in the form of monumental wall decoration. The Mari throne room suite, however, has two principal spatial components to it, Rooms 64 and 65, and it is the definitive culminating point of a circulation path. By contrast, Neo-Assyrian throne rooms encompass a single primary space and offer routes of transition between the two courtyards of their palaces. Both the Mari painting and the Assyrian “sacred tree” panel come from throne room contexts; the former from a throne room façade, the latter from a throne room interior.

As we have seen, the scholarly cultures of both the Mari and Neo-Assyrian courts, with their emphasis on monitoring the wellbeing of the king and the success of the state through prophecy and divination, are also comparable in the extensive documentation they left regarding the activities of their practitioners. The affinity between the art of Old Babylonian Mari and Neo-Assyrian art may also be observed in parallel approaches to sculpture in the round. The statue of the Mari goddess holding the flowing vase (Fig. 16) is the ancestress of the statues of male minor deities also holding the flowing vase found in the temples of Khorsabad.⁶⁶ In many respects, a comparative

treatment of the crucial emblematic images of these two representatives of the ancient Mesopotamian visual tradition would broaden our perspective.

The Assyrian "sacred tree" panel, like the "investiture" painting, is a symmetrical composition in which the use of dissymmetry has also an important role. Both compositions have a prominent arboreal component. The Assyrian "sacred tree" composition takes the single central figure of the Mari king and reduplicates it, placing it on both sides symmetrically. It compresses the pair of trees into one and places the result at the center (Fig. 3). The Assyrian tree is a complex ornamental representation that combines natural vegetal elements with what may be understood as a fantastic floral dimension.⁶⁷ What the Mari painting parses as two different species of trees, one natural, the date palm, and the other possibly fantastic, connected by means of the horizontal elements supporting the mythical quadrupeds, the Assyrian "sacred tree" merges into one design. In turn, the Assyrian "sacred tree" deploys a number of linear elements connecting various parts of the tree to one another (Figs. 3 and 29). Albeit a controversial matter, the Assyrian tree may have drawn some of its inspiration from the date palm, a tree associated with longevity in certain traditions of antiquity.⁶⁸

The presence of a supreme deity, Ishtar, in the upper register of the central panel of the Mari painting finds its counterpart in the Assyrian "sacred tree" panel at the apex of the composition in the form of the winged disk and the figure of the god depicted in it, who, like Ishtar in the Mari painting, is shown holding the ring, although without the rod (Figs. 3 and 13).⁶⁹ This god, who may be Ashur, the Assyrian state deity, is shown gesticulating toward the figure of the king to the right of the tree. This king points to the winged disk, while



29. Detail of Fig. 3 showing the king to the left of the "sacred tree." Photo: author.



30. Detail of Fig. 3 showing the king to the right of the “sacred tree.” Photo: author.

his counterpart on the other side of the tree is shown pointing to the tree itself (Figs. 3, 13, and 30).

The idiom of dissymmetry coupled with that of the meaningful occurrence of touch/no touch observed in the lateral panels of the Mari painting may also be noted in the way the royal figure holds the mace in the Assyrian “sacred tree” panel. Whereas the king at left holds his mace horizontally, inevitably overlapping or touching the tree with it (Fig. 29), and reveals his affinity to the earthbound; the king at right holds his mace vertically with no overlap with the tree (Fig. 30), revealing his dissociation from the terrestrial and his affinity to the celestial.

As underlined in Chapter 1, numerous compositions in the glyptic imagery of Babylonia and Assyria of the second and first millennia BCE bring together “sacred” or stylized trees with elements of the flowing vase and streams of water, revealing the affinity between the tree and the flowing vase (Fig. 31).⁷⁰ The presence inside the field defined by the Assyrian tree of wavy lines culminating in or connected with curlicues, reminiscent of spirals, may be taken as further indication that there is an aquatic component in the complex ornamental design of the “sacred tree” (Figs. 3 and 29).⁷¹ A subtle visual parallel also exists between the way the stream-like branches emanating from the trunks of certain representations of the “sacred tree” crisscross the field inside the tree and the way in which streams of water emanating from flowing vases form similar patterns in designs that bring together rows of flowing vases, as discussed in the previous chapter (Figs. 21–22 and 29).⁷²

That there is a connection between curlicues or spirals, such as seen inside compositions of Assyrian trees, and water may be ascertained through



31. Assyrian cylinder seal impression showing a "sacred tree" growing out of a flowing vase, Middle Assyrian period. From Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, 213, "Text-fig. 65."



32. Relief panel showing a battle scene with soldiers crossing a river from the throne room (Room B) of Ashurnasirpal II in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud, Neo-Assyrian period. London, British Museum. Photo: author.

observing that bodies of water, especially rivers, are rendered with such designs in the Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs depicting military campaigns (Fig. 32). With its hybrid arboreal and aquatic formation, the Assyrian "sacred tree" could be thought of as a visual embodiment of the Apsû itself.⁷³ It is shown here in its role of constituting a substructure for the celestial domain. With its multiple levels, the tree mediates between the earth and heaven in a process of immortalization and ascent expressed through the two figures of the king, each of which stands for one of the two crucial phases of this process.

The king at left touching the tree with his mace and pointing to it with his free hand represents the status attained by the Flood Hero in the aftermath of the Flood, a paradisiac longevity, immortality, or sacral time embodied by

the tree and the flowing vase, the background to ultimate ascent (Figs. 3 and 29).⁷⁴ As for the king at right, even though literally “on earth,” by virtue of his distance from the tree and pointing to the firmament, he represents the status of full-fledged apotheosis in heaven, the outcome of ascent, which the Mari scene shows in the upper register of its central panel (Figs. 3, 7, and 30). In this relief composition, there is a much more explicit reference to the paradigm provided by the Flood myth than in the Mari painting. Flanking the group with the tree and the royal figures are human-headed *apkallus*, antediluvian sages, whose presence in a variety of different guises throughout the Northwest Palace at Nimrud constantly signal the claim of the residence of Ashurnasirpal II to being an embodiment of the antediluvian, or primordial, cosmos.⁷⁵

Contemporary scholarship has long turned away from the earlier idea that the Assyrian “sacred tree” represents some kind of “tree of life,” and proposed explanations putatively more appropriate to the idiosyncratic characteristics of ancient Mesopotamian culture than what seemed to be an easy biblical model.⁷⁶ However, if the Assyrian “sacred tree” is indeed a conception of terrestrial paradise, a state of immortality that extends to eternity, with the possibility of leading to a higher level of celestial divinity, the idea that the tree is after all some kind of “tree of life” becomes inevitable.⁷⁷ One can remember how the plant of life or immortality Utnapishtim reveals to Gilgamesh is also a plant found in the Apsû.⁷⁸ In the final analysis, the realm of Utnapishtim in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* can be seen as the conception of a “golden age” that now exists in a crypt, and functions as a restricted source of possibility to transcend, through eternal time, the ordinary human condition defined by death, leading to further levels of liberation and ascent.

POSTSCRIPT ON SHAMANIC LORE IN THE ART OF ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA

As is the case with the Mari painting, questions of immortalization and apotheosis expressed through the figures of the Assyrian king need not be confined to a vantage point that investigates whether or not the king was deified in a particular era of ancient Mesopotamian history. In both the Mari painting and the Assyrian “sacred tree” panel, the royal figure is the medium of signification through which the hieratic processes and conceptions in question are expressed, not that these processes and ideas applied solely to the king. It is in fact much likelier that the master minds, such as scholars and artist-sages, behind the creation of these images expressed, through the figure of the king, ideas and phenomena that applied more directly to their own ontological and spiritual privileges as “godlike,” “royal,” or “shamanic” men than to the experience of the king himself as a person.

It is in this sense that the images in question, especially those that bring together a solar symbol over a vertical element, may be diagrammatic accounts of shamanic experiences. On his ascent to heaven, the shaman climbs a vertical post with notches and gradually makes his way to its apex, whence he makes a transition to the ultimate point of the journey, an exit through the sun into the presence of the supreme deity.⁷⁹ Even though the shaman's journey to the beyond is a concrete experience, the steps followed in this practice have their philosophical or mystical counterparts in an individual's progress from death, across immortality, to a final exit from temporal contingency altogether in the form of an ascent. This trajectory may even be experienced in its entirety within the confines of a human lifetime, without, however, the elimination of the threshold of death, as already stressed.

A significant number of the *apkallus* shown flanking the Assyrian “sacred tree” or the king himself in the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud are winged and bird-headed (Fig. 33). These are thought to be the heads and wings of an eagle, even though they may also be those of a vulture. Even the human-headed *apkallus* such as those flanking the “sacred tree” slab from the throne room, are winged, sharing the winged quality of the solar disk itself, whose wings, too, are those of an eagle (Figs. 3 and 12). Given that the animal most closely associated with shamanic ascent is the bird, especially the eagle, the eagle-headed and winged sages of early Neo-Assyrian art may also point to the presence of shamanic lore in this artistic tradition.⁸⁰



33. Relief panel showing Ashurnasirpal II between two winged bird-headed *apkallus* from Room G in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud, Neo-Assyrian period. London: British Museum. Photo: author.

In ancient Mesopotamian myth, the eagle is also the medium of ascent for Etana in his quest for the plant of life, which, in contrast to the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh*, is in heaven as opposed to the earth.⁸¹ The mythical bird Imdugud or Anzû, too, may be shown in the art of Early Dynastic Mesopotamia as a lion-headed eagle.⁸² The visual manifestations of a variety of deities and divine beings as animal-headed both in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, not to mention the numinous characters of birds such as the vulture and the eagle, may betray a shamanic substratum in the religions of the ancient Near East. This substratum may have been assimilated fully to state ideologies governed by rulers and scholars and expressed most directly in fine art.⁸³

The Neo-Assyrian figural type of the winged bird-headed human goes back to the Middle Assyrian period. Its association or equation with the Babylonian concept of the antediluvian sage was the result of the final codification of Assyrian art at the beginning of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. It is not clear if the figural type already stood for the *apkallu* in the Middle Assyrian period. Diana Stein has plausibly argued that the hieratic vocabulary of Neo-Assyrian art in the form of stylized trees, winged disks, and winged beings originally represented “popular themes” at home in the ritual world of the Zagros foothills, or the highlands, such as the hunter’s dance and trance experiences.⁸⁴ She has seen the glyptic art of the kingdom of the Mittani as a direct expression of this ritual world. Drawing a link between the imagery of Mittanian glyptic and prehistoric art, Stein posited that the art of the Neo-Assyrian Empire translated these elements into a systematically codified iconographic repertoire in the service of an imperial state.

Even though Stein makes no reference to shamanism in her discussion, the phenomena she invokes, especially trance experiences, ritual dance, or the state of enlightenment reached as a result of ritually induced altered states, are commensurate with shamanic practices. In this respect, the possible presence of shamanic lore in the art of the early Neo-Assyrian Empire may have been enabled by a Middle Assyrian conduit, which in turn would have been informed by a Mittanian precedent. Such lore would be a source of richness in the codification of Neo-Assyrian art rather than a trait that should threaten or undermine its unique character.

In the Mari painting as well, wingedness is not only the natural quality of the oversized blue bird captured in flight (Figs. 2 and 28), but also an aspect of the two top mythical quadrupeds of the side panels (Figs. 2 and 5). As is the case with the Neo-Assyrian winged beings, we see here two kinds, the winged human-headed being, the potential sphinx, and the winged eagle-headed being, the potential griffin. Thus, the parallels between the Mari painting and the art of Ashurnasirpal II are not only compositional but also to a certain extent figural, once again pointing to the crucial link in tradition between these two artistic corpora despite the chronological distance that separates them.⁸⁵

Matters of shamanism are being increasingly invoked in the study of the ancient world by scholars of the visual arts as well as literary works. On the one hand, it is a drastic shift to start thinking of the works of art or images so familiar to us from the study of the art and culture of the ancient Near East not merely as expressions of national and political identity, as we have come to perceive them for decades. On the other hand, it is imperative that we move beyond the limitations of these previous approaches in opening up opportunities to understand these images better and possibly in ways much more commensurate with the mindsets of their creators. Engaging with such underlying trends and practices would allow us to look at art as more of a continuum, and thereby see more in the art of each culture and period than we would if we continued looking at it solely in the vacuum of its own period.

FOUR

THE SEMANTICS OF THE FRAME OF RUNNING SPIRALS

In analyzing the Mari painting, it is crucial to observe how the frame of running spirals, which must have surrounded the entire composition, pulls together the threads of signification in this work of art (Figs. 2, 5, and 7). To that end, we ought to consider this frame as more than just decoration, but as an integral and meaningful part of the symbolism of the painting. Like the frame of the central panel of the painting, this outer frame, too, belongs to the cosmic space of the painting. Beyond functioning as a medium of compositional organization, it has semiotic value, in the sense that Schapiro and Summers discuss the “histories” of frames in the visual arts.¹ With its implications of linearity, cyclicity, and endlessness, the Mari frame of running spirals places the entire composition within a context of macro history. As such, it makes the painting’s system of signification move beyond matters of individual immortalization and ascent suggested by the royal figure, and carries it further on to a cosmological plane, whereby the emphasis is on the notion of the periodic renewal of the cosmic order along an indefinite duration of time. On the one hand, the painting outlines the individual path out of the confines of the ordinary human life span and further out of all temporal contingency. On the other hand, it delineates the course of time and history within the cosmos at the macro level.

RUNNING SPIRALS AS SYMBOLIC FORM

The running spirals of the Mari painting are paralleled closely by the decorative treatment of the podium found in Room 64 (Fig. 17). The painted *faux*

marbre decoration on the upper surface of this podium features an outer band of running spirals, interacting visually with flame-like elements along one of the inner sides of this frame, while defining a central area of irregularly concentric curves, the *faux marbre* proper. In the final archaeological report on the paintings from the site, Parrot read these motifs as water, lightning, and rain clouds, respectively, proposing the usual significance of fertility, which he considered in harmony with the symbolism of the statue of the female deity holding the flowing vase found in proximity to the podium (Fig. 16).²

This statue features another example of the motif of the running spirals. I have already drawn attention to the plausible aquatic symbolism of this ornament in the Mari painting, as Barrelet argued more than half a century ago. The series of spirals surrounding the base of the statue of the water goddess is the best visual support for such an argument. The wavy lines incised on the statue clearly represent water, as there are fish swimming along them, and the spirals at the bottom are integral elements of the aquatic configuration established by the lines.³ The consistent and prominent occurrence of this ornamental motif in the royal quarters of the palace is indicative of its deep-seated role in the visual language of Old Babylonian Mari. It is again possible to draw a connection of agrarian fertility among all three works of art, the “investiture” painting, the podium, and the goddess holding the flowing vase, as Parrot already did in his final excavation report on the palace. Once again, however, beyond literal fertility, we ought to engage more closely with the world of metaphysical thought to probe the symbolism of the running spirals.

As the primary element of ornament in the design of the painting, the frame of spirals must also refer to the Apsû, this time in its incarnation as the primordial aquatic principle permeating deeply the cosmos, and perhaps surrounding it like the cosmic Sea (*tâmtu*) (Figs. 2, 5, and 7).⁴ In the so-called Yahdun-Lim Foundation Inscription from Mari, a text describing the king’s campaign to the West, the Mediterranean Sea is almost depicted as such a divine-mythological body of water, “reminiscent of the Greek concept of *okeanos*, in both its mythological and its factual, marine sense.”⁵ In fact, we can talk about three different but interrelated visual representations of the Apsû in the Mari painting. Proceeding from the center outward, these are the nuclear aquatic, the lower register of the central panel as the subterranean crypt; the paradisiac arboreal, the landscape of the outer scene as an occluded land that I have proposed to understand on the analogy of the land of the Flood Hero; and the principal or cosmological aquatic, the Apsû as the pervasive deep that permeates and perhaps surrounds the cosmos like the Greek *okeanos*, the band of running spirals framing the main composition. Given the crucial place of the Apsû in ancient Mesopotamian cosmology and the diversity of its semantic ramifications reaching both the netherworld and the Sea, the Mari artist may have addressed this complexity at multiple levels in the visual program of the painting.

THE OUROBORIC SERPENT

Despite the use of the spiral form in the rendition of water in Neo-Assyrian relief sculpture, the band of running spirals in the ornamental mode is not common in the art of ancient Mesopotamia, whereas it appears in the art of ancient Egypt, Levant, and Anatolia extensively throughout the second millennium BCE.⁶ In order to understand the Mari spirals beyond just decoration and rather as meaningful ornament, we would benefit from looking beyond Mesopotamia for cultural parallels in which a specific symbolism may be found more clearly in association with the running spiral form and its derivatives. Forms evocative of the spiral that blend ornament and figure exist in representations of the Egyptian New Kingdom Books of the Netherworld, a visual tradition with which I have already engaged in [Chapter 2](#) in relation to the diagrammatic component of the central enclosure of the Mari painting. Carrying on this comparative endeavor could enhance our perception of the Mari running spirals. The relevant forms in the Egyptian visual corpus are those of a variety of snakes and ropes symbolic of time and eternity shown in the various divisions both of the *Amduat* and the *Book of Gates* ([Figs. 34–37](#)).

The ancient Egyptians in the New Kingdom conceived of their terrestrial beyond, the netherworld, as not outside time, but as the source of endless and inexhaustible time, which they thought of as vastly grander in scale and extent than the limited time of this world.⁷ I have referred to this temporality outside the ordinary human life span as time outside time, a phrase already used to good effect by scholars of the ancient world.⁸ The Egyptians visualized this source of endless time as a gigantic world-encircling snake, the *ouroboros*. In the *Amduat*, the entire mysteries of the netherworld are born, hour by hour, out of the body of this snake.⁹ According to Erik Hornung, the time snake, or the *ouroboros*, is “a visible symbol of endlessness as the final border of the cosmos.”¹⁰ Combining threatening and regenerative qualities, this snake appears a number of times in different forms both in the *Amduat* and the *Book of Gates*. In the eleventh hour of the *Amduat*, it is depicted in a form that approximates a band of running spirals, carried by twelve gods ([Fig. 33](#)).¹¹ In the twelfth and final hour of the *Amduat*, the same snake appears in its role as a passageway that starts in its tail and ends in its mouth ([Fig. 26](#)). The sun god and its crew are shown about to enter the tail of the gigantic snake, called the “Life-of-the-gods,” to emerge out of its mouth rejuvenated, immediately behind the solar ascent shown in the form of the scarab beetle and the solar disk at the edge of the composition. The reversed direction of the heads of the gods towing the bark shown in this hour signifies the reversal of time required for renewal.¹²

This configuration is analogous in principle to the classic ancient Mesopotamian motif of the flowing vase, whose streams go out of the vase in

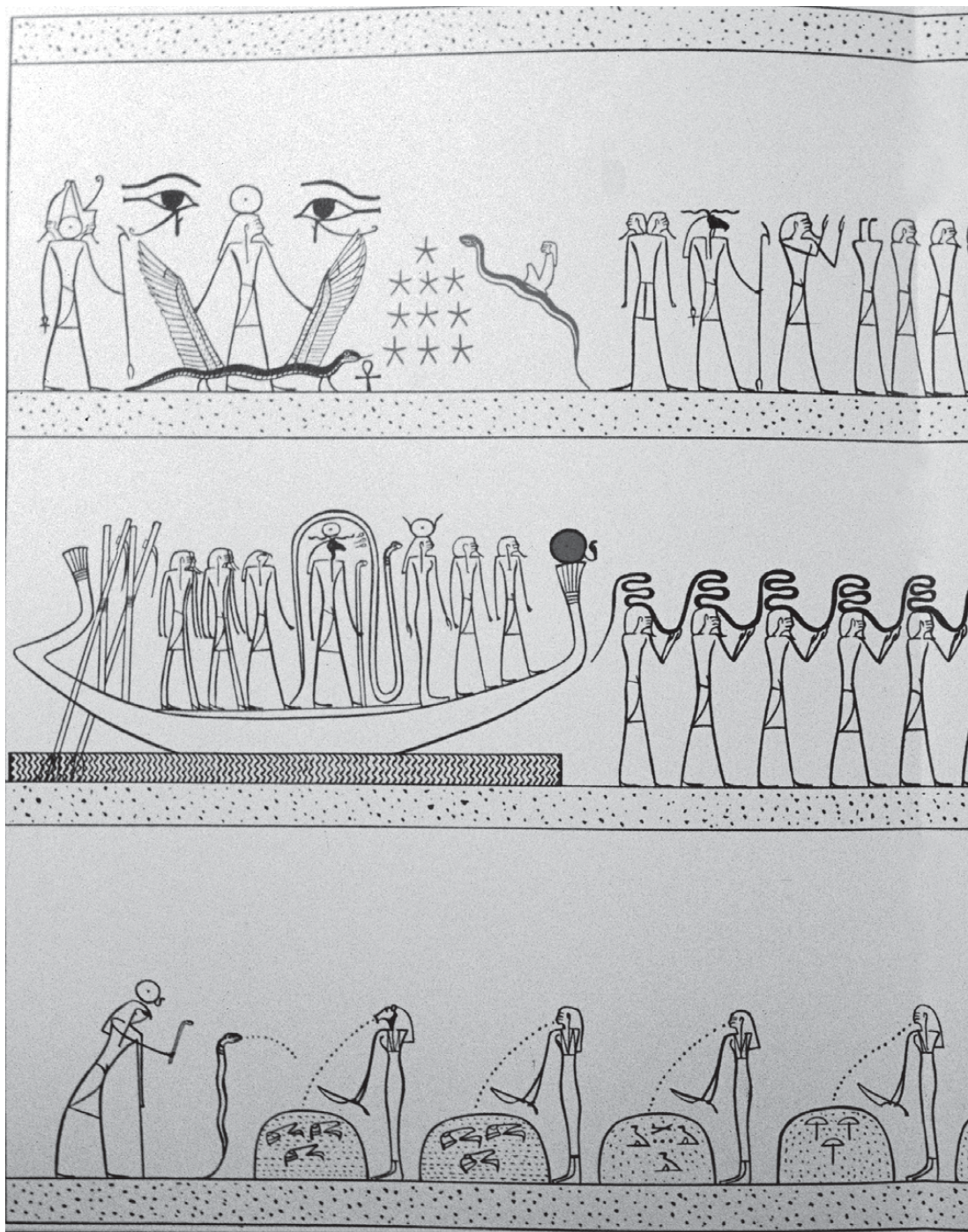
the form of wavy lines, while the fish in them swim in the opposite direction, toward the source of the water, as seen clearly on the statue of Gudea holding the vessel (Fig. 20). The reversal in direction in depictions of the flowing vase, too, signifies the requisite reversal of time for the return to a primordial source of purity, commensurate with the god Enki/Ea and his domain, leading ultimately to regeneration and, by extension, immortalization, since renewal or rejuvenation would be pointless if they led again to growth and aging.¹³

In the Mari painting (Fig. 7), as well as in the streams carved on the statue of the female deity holding the flowing vase (Fig. 16), however, the fish swim in both directions, rather than only toward the source.¹⁴ In both of these works of art, the fish swimming toward the source are more numerous than those moving in the opposite direction.¹⁵ This dual rendition of the fish seems to be unique to the Old Babylonian period. A fragmentary statue of a female deity dated to the same era, today in the Louvre, also features fish both entering and exiting the vase. On this statue, out of the nine fish preserved, seven are swimming toward, two away from the vessel.¹⁶ While maintaining the age-old thematic features of the flowing vase, the streams, and the fish, the Old Babylonian artist evidently introduced an innovation in its rendition in both sculpture and painting through this dual directionality of the fish.

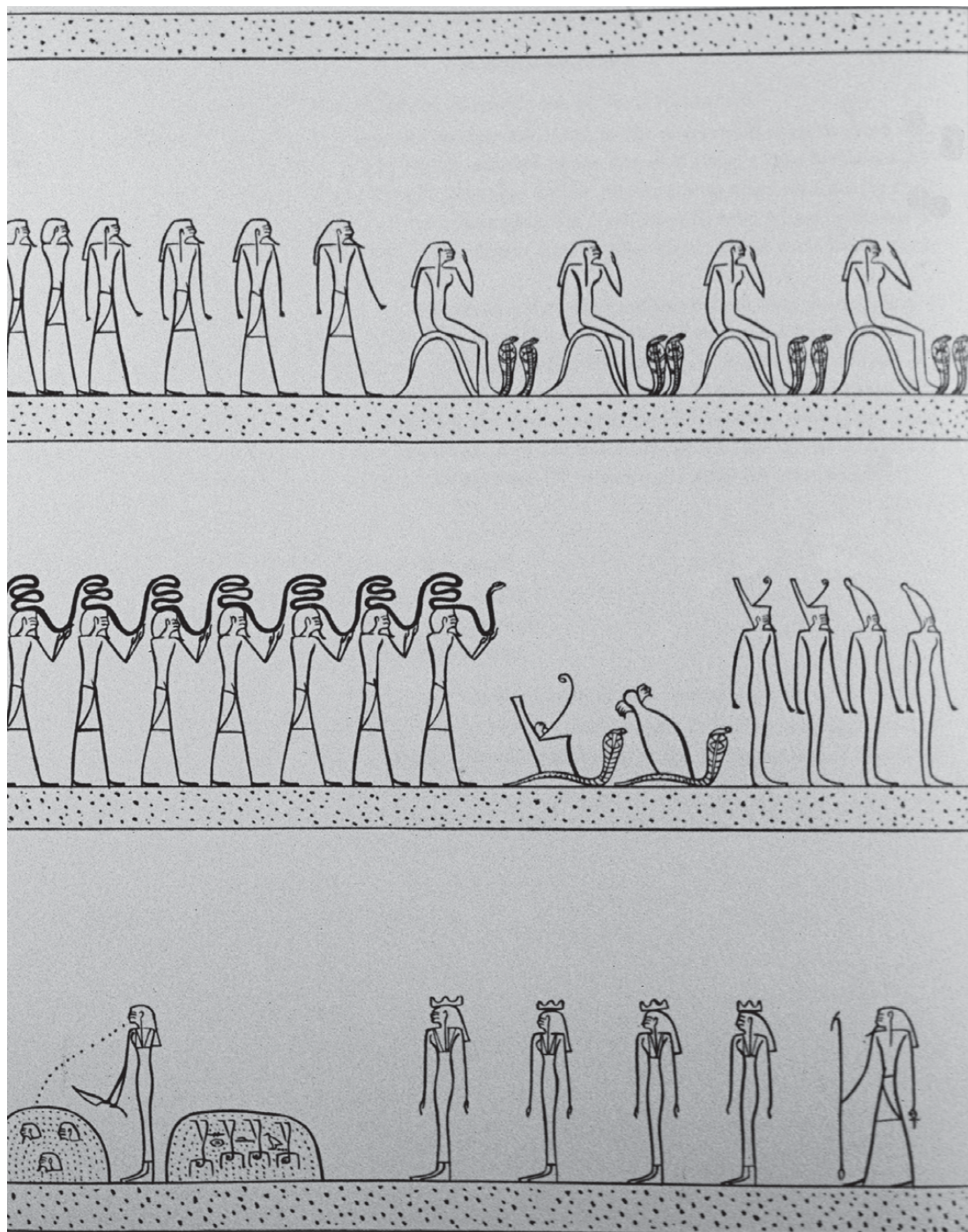
In relation to the reversal in the direction of the last hour of the night in the *Amduat* and the solar crew's entering the snake from its tail to exit from its mouth (Fig. 26), Hornung warns that the body of the snake is a passage only; it would be a deadly error to wish to stay there forever. Eternity, according to Hornung, is fulfilled only if it is followed by an exit from the snake's mouth, culminating eventually in an ascent, the solar rising.¹⁷ It is perhaps in an analogous logic that the fish are shown both swimming toward and away from the Old Babylonian and Mari flowing vases (Figs. 7 and 16). Their implied entrance into the vessel by swimming against the current represents the reversal in time required for renewal, with their implied exit from it the rejuvenated state leading to immortality. The classic configuration suggests only entrance into the vessel, without, however, necessarily meaning that there is no exit. Rather, it is only the process of the return to the source that is highlighted to stand for the entire process. The Old Babylonian formula may be original in its signaling in one image the mechanics of the full process.

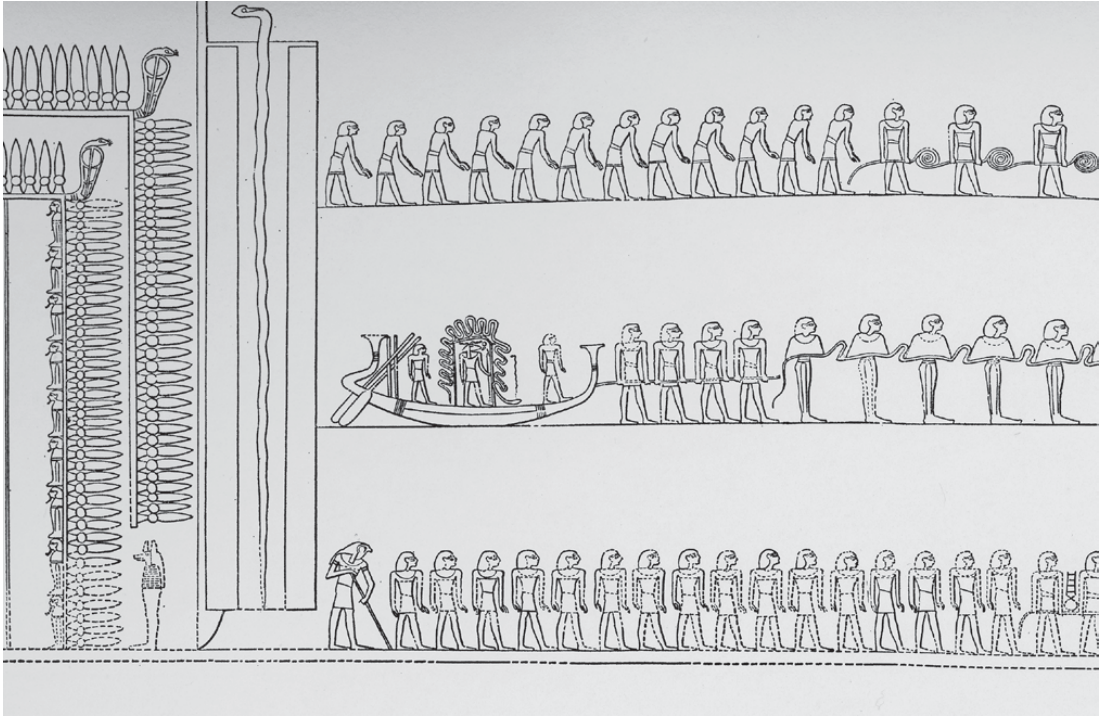
PRIMORDIAL CHAOS AS SOURCE OF PERIODIC DESTRUCTION AND RENEWAL

In the horizontal scheme of the last hour of the *Amduat*, the representation of the solar exit or ascent from the netherworld in the form of the scarab beetle is placed ahead of the scene of renewal in the form of the passage through the snake (Fig. 26). In the Mari painting, ascent is finalized in the register showing



34. Drawing of the eleventh hour of the *Amduat*, Tomb of Ramesses VI. Republished with permission of Princeton University Press, from Piankoff, *The Tomb of Ramesses VI*, Fig. 86; permission conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.

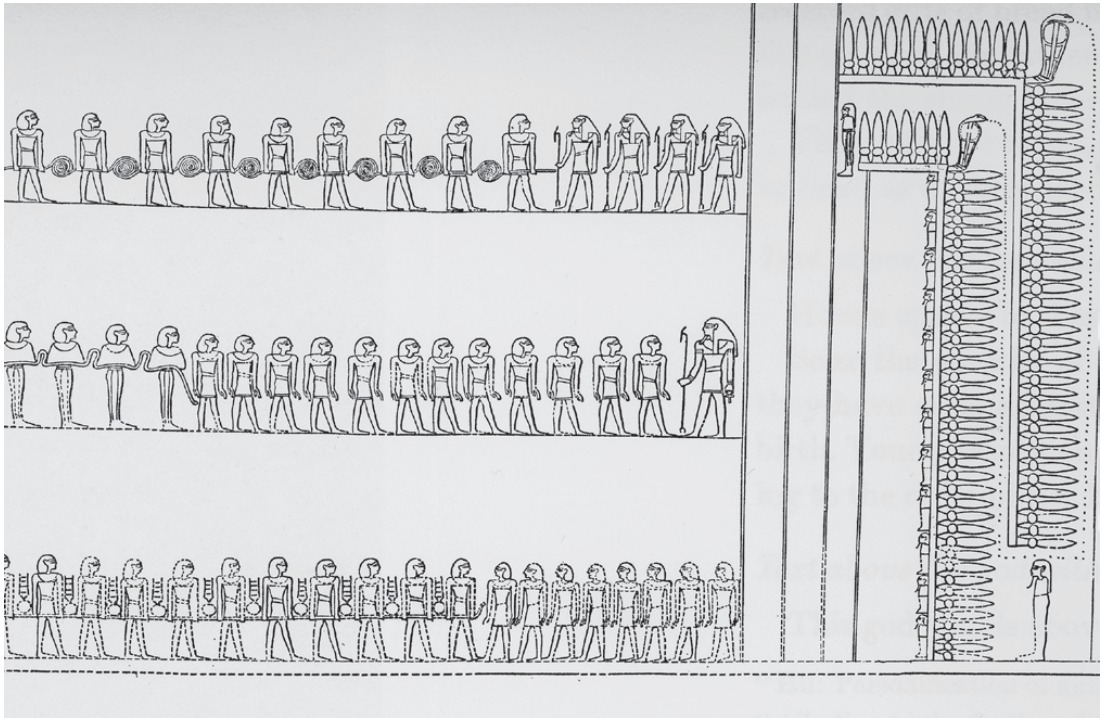




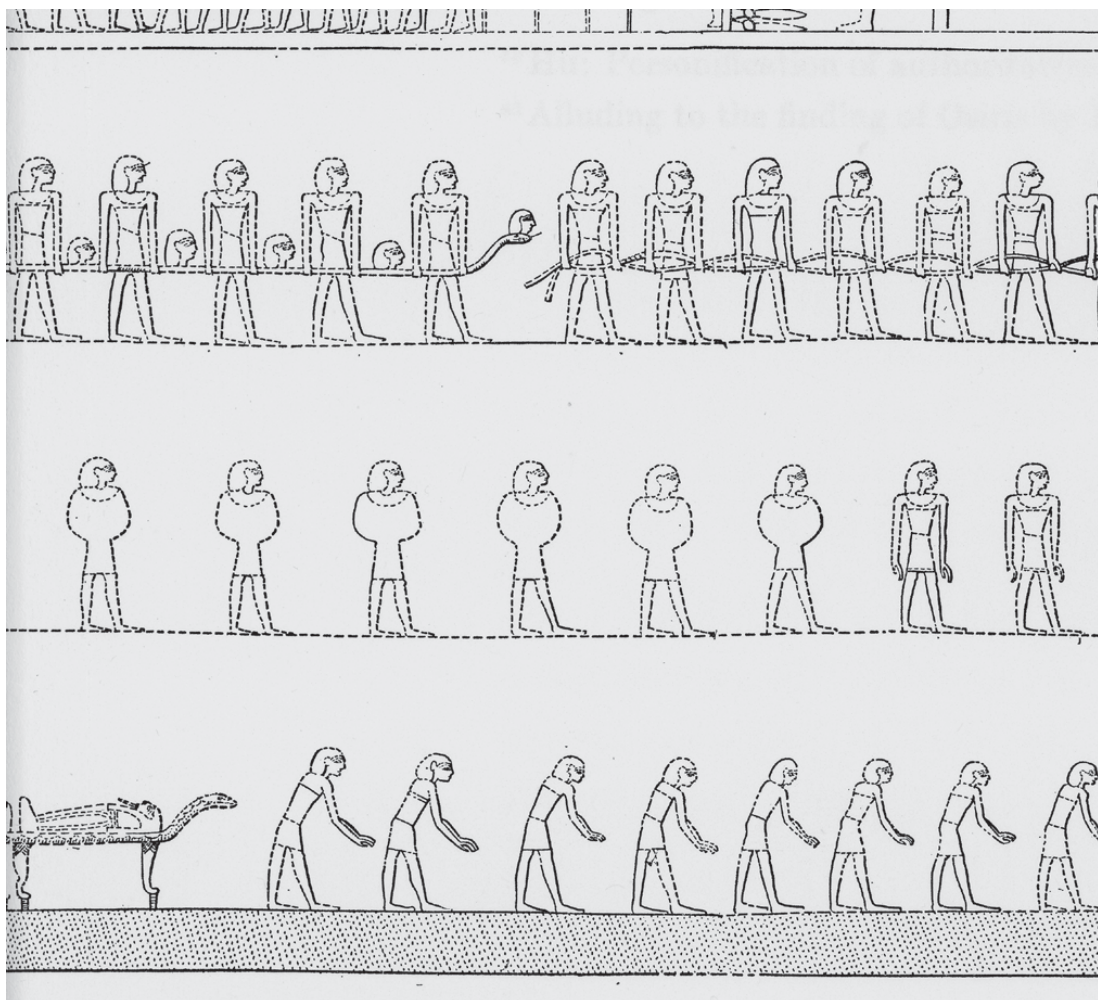
35. Drawing of the fourth hour of the *Book of Gates*, Tomb of Ramesses VI. Republished with permission of Princeton University Press, from Piankoff, *The Tomb of Ramesses VI*, Fig. 42; permission conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.

the royal figure facing Ishtar, which, in turn, is placed above the Mari composition's scene of rejuvenation, the flowing vase (Figs. 2, 5, and 7). Translated into the paradigms offered by the Flood story, the Flood Hero, by embarking on the ark, enters a passage of renewal or regeneration; and by eventually exiting the ark, emerges refreshed to be immortalized outside by the gods. His embarking on the ark is like entry into the body of the Egyptian snake or the Mesopotamian vase, the process of going backward in time for renewal. What is missing in the Flood myth is the idea of an ultimate ascent following the attainment of immortality upon exit, which both the Mari and Egyptian representations address in their own distinctive ways.

When one looks at the final scene of the *Amduat* showing the twelfth hour of the night, one sees that in the field beyond the scene of renewal in the body of the snake there is on the one hand the representation of the exit to heaven in the form of the scarab beetle pushing the solar disk, and on the other the figure of Osiris, reclining against the edge of the frame in the bottom register underneath the depiction of sunrise (Fig. 26). Osiris cannot participate in the ascent; he is to remain indefinitely in the netherworld, where he lives a lifetime of "millions of years," according to the ancient Egyptian *Book of the Dead* (Spell



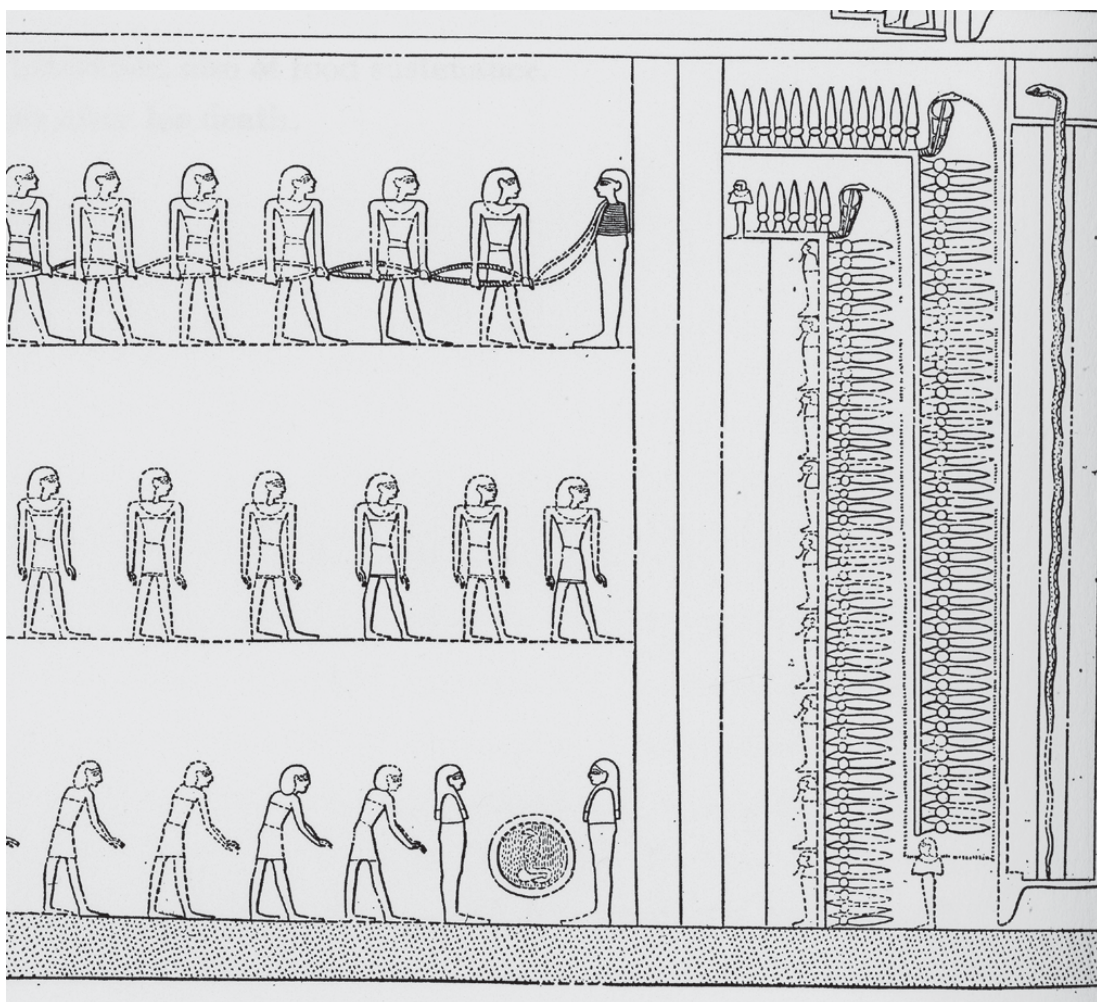
36. Detail from the fourth hour of the *Book of Gates* showing the twelve goddesses personifying the hours with the time snake coiled between them, Tomb of Ramesses I (Dynasty 19, 1307–1306 BCE), Valley of the Kings, Thebes. Photo Credit: Gianni Dagli Orti / The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY.



37. Drawing of the fifth hour of the *Book of Gates*, Tomb of Ramesses VI. Republished with permission of Princeton University Press, from Piankoff, *The Tomb of Ramesses VI*, Fig. 42; permission conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.

175) from the New Kingdom.¹⁸ This indeterminate and open-ended Osirian state is an eternity in the sense of its stretching virtually endlessly, and comparable to the state of the Babylonian Flood Hero. This extreme longevity is a state belonging to the Egyptian terrestrial beyond. With his association with the Nile inundation, agrarian fertility, and longevity, Osiris has an affinity to ancient Mesopotamian conceptions centered on the Apsû and the flowing vase as a source of purity, fertility, and renewal.¹⁹

In relation to Osiris and his stay in the Egyptian netherworld, we may ask the same questions that we asked earlier regarding the Flood Hero's indefinite tenure as an immortal placed apart in a terrestrial beyond. Is Osiris to remain that way forever, or is there the implicit potential that he, too, will at some



point ascend, or that his quasi-condemned status will be lifted? The fact that Osiris already ascends in the *Pyramid Texts* from the Old Kingdom as well as his meaningful visual placement in the twelfth hour of the *Amduat* right underneath the solar ascent may be considered suggestive of the presence of such a potential or promise that has not been fulfilled.²⁰

About three centuries earlier than the first attestations of scenes from the *Amduat* in New Kingdom Egypt, the Mari painting may be thought to prefigure, albeit in a paradigm that is not solar but stellar, the systematic and diagrammatic endeavor found in Thebes to depict a hieratic process of renewal and ascent. Whereas the relevant concepts are expressed in a simultaneously much denser and more subdued manner within the format of a singular representation in the Mari painting, their New Kingdom Egyptian counterparts

are much clearer especially by virtue of their images' constituting a sequence and being accompanied by extensive textual glosses that identify the scenes and their elements.

It is through such textual glosses that we understand a number of ophidian figures in the *Amduat* and the *Book of Gates* as representations of eternal time on the one hand, and as those of the arch-enemy of the sun god, the serpent Apophis, on the other (Figs. 34–37). Apophis is the supreme manifestation of primordial chaos in the New Kingdom Egyptian Books of the Netherworld. His resemblance to the *ouroboric* snake representing inexhaustible time in the relevant scenes points both to the destructive and regenerative aspects of primordial chaos in the New Kingdom.²¹ In ancient Egyptian religion, chaos as a destructive and regenerative principle is embodied by the primordial ocean Nun. In ancient Mesopotamia, the destructive and regenerative aspect of the Flood is analogous to the forces of the Egyptian Nun in enabling the rise of the cosmic order on the one hand, and causing it to revert back to the primordial state of undifferentiated unity on the other.²² This threat is always present in ancient Egyptian perceptions of order, whereas in ancient Mesopotamia, the Flood constitutes the singular occurrence of a full return to the undifferentiated state followed by the reestablishment of a new order.

The Apsû is never an explicitly threatening phenomenon in ancient Mesopotamian cosmology. However, in the Babylonian poem of cosmogony, *Enuma Elish*, with roots possibly in later second millennium BCE, Apsû as a god is the deposed father of Enki/Ea, on whose defeated body the younger god establishes his residence, also called the Apsû.²³ Regarding Ea's defeat of Apsû and establishing his new abode over his opponent, Richard J. Clifford writes:

Ea founds his house upon the vanquished body of water, Apsû. He gives his new dwelling the name "Apsû." The location of his house upon Apsû, and its name suggest its function in the cosmos. The dwelling of the victorious Ea commemorates the victory over Apsû and perhaps in so commemorating it keeps in check the sweet waters under the earth.²⁴

Furthermore, in the same poem, after his defeat of Tiamat, Marduk, too, ensures that the "waters" of Tiamat are in check: "Half of her he set up and made as a cover, heaven. / He stretched out the hide and assigned watchmen, / And ordered them not to let her waters escape."²⁵ As such, in ancient Mesopotamia as well, the cosmic bodies of water, be they sweet or salt, have an unruly dimension and need to be contained for the wellbeing of order.²⁶

As also expressed by Holloway in his study on conceptions of the ideal temple and the ark in ancient Mesopotamian and biblical traditions, "[i]n Mesopotamian sources temples and ziggurats are repeatedly described as having

their foundations in the *apsû*, which was, among other things, the cosmic subterranean waters that existed prior to the creation of the habitable world.”²⁷ In one of the “propositions” articulating his analysis, Holloway writes:

“The temple is often associated with the waters of life which flow forth from a spring within the building itself – or rather the temple is viewed as incorporating within itself or as having been built upon such a spring.” Conversely, the temple is founded upon the chaos waters, which have the potential for overwhelming the world with death and destruction; the temple and its ritual guard against the eruption of these waters.²⁸

Holloway’s proposition underscores the dual nature of the relationship between the ideal structure and the subterranean body of water that constitutes its foundation. Even though there is no imagery of destruction in the figural repertoire of the Mari painting, the frame of running spirals expresses in a suppressed or encrypted manner the complex idea of periodic renewal, possible only in tandem with periodic destruction.

The running spirals of the Mari painting (Figs. 2, 5, and 7) may be signaling the sustained presence of a destructive and regenerative aquatic force as a principle in the cosmological consciousness of ancient Mesopotamia as well. Just as in ancient Egypt the ophidian forms of the New Kingdom Books of the Netherworld have both threatening and regenerative associations, the aquatic element in ancient Mesopotamian cosmology may be thought to be both potentially destructive and regenerative. These qualities are perhaps reflected best in the Flood myth, in which the surge of water is both catastrophic and eventually purifying and fertilizing.²⁹

SERPENTS, STREAMS, AND ENDLESS TIME

In an ancient Mesopotamian idiom, the aquatic imagery of the Mari painting, be it ornamental or figural, emerges as the primary visual mode through which conceptions of endless time and regeneration are expressed. In the previous two chapters, we have seen how the flowing vase and the compositions formed by its repetition resulted in geometric patterns suggestive of notions of eternity. We have also seen how the Assyrian “sacred tree,” too, with its spiral-like curlicues and the crisscross of the stream-like elements in its figural plane, stands for the same notions. In the ancient Egyptian New Kingdom Books of the Netherworld, it is the ophidian form that conveys most clearly the relevant concepts. The principle of the primordial ocean Nun, however, is never absent in the background of these Egyptian perceptions of the endlessness of time in the beyond.³⁰ Both types of imagery, aquatic and ophidian, partake of wavy lines and spiral or spiral-like shapes, with form here emerging as a

unifying principle in conveying meaning between the visual cultures of Mari and ancient Egypt in the second millennium BCE.³¹

Perhaps the most synoptic imagery from the wider corpus of the art of ancient Mesopotamia revealing the figural affinity between serpents and streams of water is found on the well-known chlorite vessel said to be from Early Dynastic Khafaje. It shows a “hero” figure twice, one holding two streams of water, the other grasping two snakes, both rendered in clear apposition to one another around the vessel.³² Another work of art from the ancient Near East that features the connection is the Elamite Untash-Napirisha (ca. 1275–1240 BCE) stela, the relief decoration of which is framed by two serpents.³³ The relief also depicts goddesses holding streams coming out of vases, with their lower limbs transformed into fish tails, which, in turn, are absorbed by the vases as though they were streams. We see here as well the intercrossing of the streams of water at the point where they are grasped by the goddesses, even though, oddly, the points of intersection do not feature vases.³⁴ Bands of guilloché separate the registers of the relief composition. With their Mesopotamian-Iranian backgrounds, both artifacts speak to the cross-cultural and diachronic character of the symbolism of the serpents and streams in the visual language of the ancient Near East.

The Egyptian *Book of Gates* is particularly rich in featuring both snakes and ropes of a morphology approximating that of the band of running spirals of the Mari painting. Most of these forms consist of repetitive curvilinear elements combined along a straight horizontal axis (Figs. 34–35 and 37). The fifth hour of the *Book of Gates*, for instance, features the snake Apophis in its middle register (Fig. 35), comparable in form to the *ouroboric* world-encirler, a representation of time, that appears in the eleventh hour of the *Amduat*, as we have seen (Fig. 34).³⁵ A serpent more specifically identified as “time” appears in the fourth hour of the *Book of Gates* between twelve goddesses representing the hours (Fig. 36).³⁶ The bottom register of the fifth hour of the *Book of Gates* features the depiction of a serpent incorporating the recurrent circular hieroglyph, *ahau*, meaning “lifetime,” in reference to the inexhaustible source of time and life that the Egyptian beyond offers the deceased (Fig. 35).³⁷ In the sixth hour of the *Book of Gates*, time is shown in the top register in the form of two twisted ropes spooled out of the mouth of the god Aqen (Fig. 37).³⁸ The twists are represented in the form of a chain of ovals, again conforming to the visual configuration of curvilinear elements arranged along a linear horizontal axis.³⁹

The Egyptian interest in representing endless or divine time through ophidian or curvilinear forms constitutes a good case study in the connection between form and meaning.⁴⁰ With a tradition in ornamental spiral bands that goes back to their Middle Kingdom, the Egyptians must have been aware of an inherent semantic capacity in these designs to translate them into figural

or quasi-figural representations of serpents and ropes denoting the endlessness of time in their New Kingdom Books of the Netherworld. The band of running spirals surrounding, like an *ouroboros*, the procedure of renewal, immortalization, and ascent shown in the Mari painting must also be thought of as partaking of the same symbolism associated with these forms within the intercultural environment of the Middle and Late Bronze Age in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East.

With repetitive curvilinear forms in regular intervals arranged along a linear axis, these visual schemes signal the endlessness of duration through the linear form and that of cyclical revolution through the curvilinear or spiral. The ancient Egyptian concepts of *djet* as duration and *neheh* as repetition, both in principle endless, in constituting together the sum total of all time available in the cosmos, and hence eternity, may be thought to resonate in these visual formulations.⁴¹ A close counterpart to this dual expression of eternity can be found in ancient Mesopotamia in the Akkadian concepts of *dārû*, continuity or duration, and *pālû*, term or change. The Old Babylonian phrase found in legal documents, *ana dūr u pala*, which means literally “for the continuity and the change,” indicates that a commercial transaction is established “forever” against any future claim on the part of the vendor.⁴² Such pairing of two terms, one of which corresponds to continuity and duration and the other to repeated change, in the expression of the concept of all time, even if in the cliché or hyperbole of a legal document, speaks to a shared mode of thinking between ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia in the conceptualization of the endlessness of time within the cosmos.

In both ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, the notion of duration can also be found in the continuity of a line of kings or reigns following one another, expressed especially in lists of kings and officials. Beyond any prosaic “chronometric” purposes and conceptions of royal or official legitimacy, these lists are perhaps the purest expression of temporal continuity and change. On the one hand the chain of reigns or tenures of officials is continuous; on the other, there is constant renewal of the office with each new incumbent. Such lists may not be so much manifestations of “linear” time as they are embodiments both of continuity, or duration, and change, or renewal.⁴³

In visualizing the temporal configuration of the *Sumerian King List*, Jean-Jacques Glassner has proposed a sinusoidal scheme whereby each city’s royal supremacy is characterized by stages of foundation, aging, and end, giving way gradually to those of following cities. Cycles and their different stages thus overlap, with no break in the continuity of the curve.⁴⁴ One wonders if running spirals, first closing in and then unfolding outward to yield to the following unit without a break, and with simultaneously discrete and continuous characteristics, qualify for a much more culturally internal visualization of

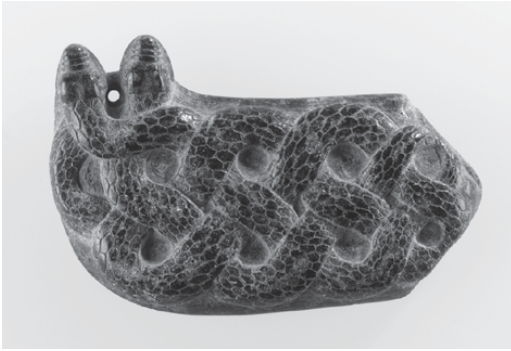
cosmic time in the ancient Near East than a pure mathematical form such as the sinus curve.⁴⁵

One may think that bands of running spirals are so common in the art of the Aegean, Anatolia, Syria, Levant, and Egypt throughout the second millennium BCE that not every occurrence of this motif must be an expression of time and eternity. The ornamental mode, however, unlike the figural, has another kind of potency. While ornament certainly does not lack meaning, it is also difficult to ascribe a definite meaning to it. The tension between determinate meaning and a purely aesthetic sensibility is very much part of the ontology of ornament. One may not always tell when an ornamental design is evocative of a specific concept and when it is present by virtue of the aesthetic sensibilities of an established visual tradition.⁴⁶ With all his figural and metaphysical subtlety and his reveling in modes of semiotic indeterminacy, what better device for the Mari painter than the band of running spirals to evoke ideas of time, regeneration, and eternity as principles without asserting them too openly in the form of figural depictions?

NEO-SUMERIAN ROOTS

Perhaps the one era in ancient Mesopotamia in which there is some limited evidence for serpents' standing for the primordial cosmos, characterized by the undifferentiated state of unity, the proper context of time outside time, is the period of Gudea of Lagash (ca. 2100 BCE). A steatite lid for a lamp or box associated with this ruler (Fig. 38), excavated at Girsu (modern Tello), features two intertwined serpents that parallel some of the depictions of the time serpent in the Egyptian netherworld (Figs. 34–37).⁴⁷ Gudea's connections with notions of a chthonic cosmos are well known, since Ningishzida, a god of the netherworld symbolized by the mush-hush serpent, is his personal god.⁴⁸ Two upright mush-hush serpents, winged and leonine, appear on a steatite vase dedicated to this god by Gudea, also from Girsu (Fig. 39).⁴⁹ They hold what seem to be door-posts framing two intertwined natural serpents, similar to those shown on the aforementioned steatite lid. In addition to the serpents, both mythical and natural, the flowing vase is one of the most prominent images of the art of Gudea. It appears not only on his basin, seal, and stela fragments (Figs. 19 and 21–22), but also on the diorite statue depicting the ruler holding it with additional smaller vases at his feet, as we have seen (Fig. 20).

In certain ways, the time and art of Gudea are special, if not anomalous, in the ancient Mesopotamian culture of the post-Akkadian period with their lack of the title king (*lugal*), bearded royal image, and depictions of the conferral of the ring and rod on the ruler figure by celestial deities. All these three parameters are present in full prominence in the art of the contemporary



38. Steatite lid or cover of a lamp found at Girsu, Neo-Sumerian period. Paris, Louvre. © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY.



39. Drawing of the steatite vase of Gudea found at Girsu, Neo-Sumerian period. Paris, Louvre. From Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, 119, "Text-fig. 33."

Ur III kingdom, a territorial state modeled after its Akkadian forebear, and the counterpart state of Lagash in constituting the Neo-Sumerian culture in ancient Mesopotamia. Even though the flowing vase does occur on the fragmentary Stela of Urnammu, its appearance in the extant art of the Ur III period is limited beyond this monument when compared to its abundant occurrence in the art of Gudea.

In contrast to the Ur III culture, the rhetoric of Gudea also lacks solar royal epithets such as *utu kalam-ma*, sun god of the land, and beyond the extremely fragmentary stela now in Istanbul, his extant art does not feature celestial symbols.⁵⁰ To express matters within the model provided by the Mari painting as the pilot image of this study, it is as though the art of Gudea were nestled fully in the notions referenced by the lower register of the central panel of the painting, with limited foray into the upper. By contrast, the art of the Ur III period encompasses concepts conveyed by both registers, with the emphasis, however, on those communicated by the upper.

Both the art of Gudea and that of Urnammu, however, are unanimous on the depiction of the flowing vase as an aerial element in addition to a

terrestrial symbol. Although the flowing vase is never shown incorporated into celestial signs, and hence the choice here of the word “aerial,” there are female deities holding the vase while they hover in the air both on the basin of Gudea (Fig. 19) and fragments of the Stela of Urnamma.⁵¹ On the basin of Gudea, the aerial deities are counterparts of the goddesses who stand on a stream of water while also holding the flowing vase (Fig. 19).⁵² There is an aerial deity holding an aerial vase per each terrestrial vase, which, in turn, is held by two terrestrial goddesses. The two vases, the terrestrial and aerial, of which the latter is smaller in size, are aligned along the vertical, with their streams also merging. The terrestrial goddesses are more numerous, and each with one of her arms extending to hold her neighbor’s vase, they establish an almost staggered design reminiscent of networks or systems of flowing vases and their streams typical of the art of Gudea (Figs. 21–22).⁵³ As noted in Chapter 2, in the Babylonian and Assyrian art of the second millennium BCE, there are also seals that show streams emanating from terrestrial flowing vases reaching above to merge with either aerial flowing vases or winged disks, whose streamers are then merged with the streams of water.⁵⁴

In both ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian cosmology, there is evidence for the co-extensiveness of chthonic locales with celestial ones, such as the presence of a heavenly Nile in the Egyptian sky, or the netherworld’s being located in the interior, and hence the invisible part, of the sky in ancient Mesopotamia.⁵⁵ In addition to expressing the presence of water in both the sky in the form of rain clouds as well as on earth, the ancient Mesopotamian imagery that features streams of water connecting earth and heaven may also be indicative of the emphasis on a terrestrial beyond, expressed through the flowing vase and its streams, in its potential to lead to or be connected with its celestial counterpart.

The extant art of Gudea seems to be concentrated more emphatically on notions of time outside time, the Apsû as a pristine terrestrial realm, and chthonic conceptions of endless time than those of celestial transcendence, ascent, or solar conceptions of royalty, divinity, and exit from temporality. The rhetoric of Gudea seems to have favored the visual expression of the foundation to transcendence over that of full-fledged, or astral, transcendence *per se*. We may here be looking at an instance of the suppression of these latter concepts rather than their rejection or elimination. Thus, the art of Gudea may be thought of as the earliest and most concentrated crystallization in ancient Mesopotamia of those images of time outside time that have their impact on the expression of similar notions in the Mesopotamian art of the second and first millennium BCE, the imagery of the Apsû, of which both the flowing vase and the Assyrian “sacred tree” are manifestations. With its chthonic,

almost “Osirian” focus, the art of Gudea partakes as much of notions of temporal endlessness within the cosmos as do the ancient Egyptian scenes of the netherworld.⁵⁶

AN ANATOLIAN OUROBOROS?

The art of Gudea and the serpents of the Egyptian scenes of the netherworld from the New Kingdom are not the only comparisons from the art of the greater ancient Near East to the streams and spirals of the Old Babylonian Mari imagery. Another representation of an ophidian mythological creature that approximates the form of running spirals comes from the art of Anatolia at the end of the Bronze Age, a visual tradition with a strong fondness for spirals and guilloches, especially in the ornamental repertoire of its glyptic. Indeed, the Anatolian seal carver of the Assyrian Trade Colony period and the Hittite Kingdom seems to have reveled in patterns of double or running spirals as elements of frame and border.⁵⁷

The Anatolian snake appears on a well-known orthostat relief associated with a gateway structure at the Late Hittite site of Arslantepe, ancient Melid (Fig. 40). Its exact architectural setting, however, is unknown.⁵⁸ The composition shows the snake menaced by two human figures with weapons, both of whom may be manifestations of the weather god. The dots above the curls of the serpent may be an abstract rendition of the skin of the snake or elements of weather conditions related to a storm such as hail. Also striking are the wavy lines in the upper field of the image, between which are human figures suspended upside down.⁵⁹ The relief is frequently illustrated in survey books and chapters of Hittite art, but with limited discussion, since a secure iconographic identification of the scene is not available.



40. Orthostat relief from the Early Iron Age gateway structure in Arslantepe/Malatya (Melid) showing a conflict between the weather god and a serpent, Neo-Hittite period. Ankara: Museum of Anatolian Civilizations. Photo: author.

The composition is often plausibly thought of as the battle against the monster Illuyanka, a primordial serpent who challenges the supreme rule of the storm god Teshub. While the former is possibly associated with the subterranean water sources, the latter is the lord of the rainfall.⁶⁰ The text of the myth is preserved in two versions, both in Hittite Empire period (ca. 1400–1200 BCE) copies, but with roots in the Old Hittite period (ca. 1650–1400 BCE).⁶¹ A parallel may be seen in the battle against Ullikumi of the Kumarbi cycle, in which a monster, this time one made of diorite, rebels against Teshub's authority under the aegis of the former ruler of the cosmos, Kumarbi.⁶² Even though Ullikumi is not a snake, he is associated with water and an archaic cosmos, in which the expertise again belongs to the god Ea, the ultimate source in the poem for the means to defeat the monster.⁶³ The story is analogous to the final challenge to Zeus's rule from the monster Typhon after Zeus's defeat of the god Kronos and his sons, the Titans, as described in Hesiod's *Theogony* (820–885). Typhon, too, is an ophidian being.⁶⁴

If the orthostat relief in fact shows an episode from the myth of Illuyanka, then we can note how, like Typhon, Illuyanka, too, is a manifestation or representative of a now encrypted archaic cosmos, which on the one hand is threatening and destructive, but on the other an embodiment of eternity or time outside time. Even if the scene may not be a depiction of the battle against Illuyanka *per se*, its visual cues point to a cosmic battle in which anthropomorphic deities are set against a monstrous being, fulfilling the well-known mythical paradigm of conflict between the forces of a new order and those of an older cosmic system.⁶⁵ Again, this paradigm is not unlike that of the Flood, in which a threatening and destructive cataclysm is in fact the manifestation or resurgence of a dormant undifferentiated cosmos bringing about a process of purification.⁶⁶ The connection between serpents and water is also clear in the ancient Egyptian conception of the end of the cosmos, as presented in the New Kingdom *Book of the Dead*, whereby only Atum and Osiris survive the destruction in the form of a snake dwelling in the primordial ocean Nun.⁶⁷

The tradition of depicting the primordial cosmos and its temporality in the form of a multi-curled serpent was clearly not confined to Egypt. It extended to the art of ancient western Asia as well. Although a single image and not securely identified, in light of the larger Anatolian interest in running spirals in the Middle and Late Bronze Age, the occurrence of the serpent figure in a Late Hittite artistic context in the second millennium BCE is an important piece of evidence for the present inquiry. As Winfried Orthmann indicates, even though there are no extant comparisons to the Arslantepe/Melid serpent from the Hittite world, comparisons abound in the glyptic of the Mittanian and Assyrian cultures.⁶⁸ None of these comparisons

constitutes as close an approximation of the running spiral form as does the Arslantepe/Melid serpent, but they all are rendered with recurrent wavy forms. The art and monuments of Arslantepe/Melid represent a phase of Hittite art that comes immediately after the collapse of the empire around 1200 BCE. However, as often stressed by scholars, Hittite culture certainly lived on beyond this political change, especially in an area that lies southeast of the imperial heartland.⁶⁹ With a date in the last phases of the Late Bronze Age, the culture of the city state of Melid is often considered to be a direct continuation of that of the Empire.⁷⁰

As a wide-ranging and deep-seated characteristic shared by all the visual traditions we have invoked, Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Anatolian, ornamental and figural designs of running spirals and serpents have the potential to reference the principle of sacral time, or time outside time, and hence temporal eternity or endlessness. This kind of macro temporality is on the one hand the source and basis of all periodic destruction and regeneration of the world order, and on the other the medium of individual regeneration and immortalization, an embodiment of the “life-of-the-gods,” as the Egyptians called their serpent of regeneration in the last hour of the *Amduat*. Paradisiac formulations of place, such as the Mouth of the Rivers of the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh*, or the ancient Greek Isles of the Blessed and Elysium, are localized manifestations of this mode of time in different ancient Near Eastern traditions.

Within this multi-cultural framework, it is by stepping fruitfully into such a domain of divine time that an individual might attain immortality or experience indefinite longevity of life, such as the hero of the Babylonian Flood stories and the heroes of the Trojan and Theban wars transported to the Isles of the Blessed in ancient Greek myth. It is also this realm of eternity and paradisiac longevity that constitutes the foundation for a further step, the ascent to the ultimate level of divinity, apotheosis, or an exit from all temporal contingency, both profane and sacral.⁷¹ In the expression of such philosophical concepts, individual works of art from different eras and geographic areas within the greater Near East were surely in conversation with one another. The art of ancient Egypt and Anatolia reflect key instances of parallelism with the art of Mari. The art of Gudea emerges as the conceptual background within Mesopotamia for an artistic tradition concentrated on conveying notions of the primordial cosmos and time outside time. Shared among a number of ancient traditions in a vast area and with due variations from culture to culture in the specific forms and guises they took, the relevant philosophical principles remained permanent and unanimous throughout centuries and found constant expression in the visual arts.

In the foregoing, I have addressed visual depictions of temporal eternity, or time outside time, with special emphasis on aquatic imagery, running spirals, and ophidian forms in the art of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Anatolia.⁷² An attainment of this level of eternity and access to the source of constant regeneration on the part of an individual is the first stage in the process of liberation from the bonds of profane time defined by birth, life, and death. In the [following chapter](#), my focus shifts to the second stage of the process, the ascent to the ultimate level of divinity, or an exit from all temporal contingency, including that of sacral time itself.

FIVE

IMPLICATIONS OF SACRAL TIME AND ESCHATOLOGY

Both the ancient Egyptian New Kingdom scheme of solar regeneration and the Mari painting inscribe their depictions within a cyclical framework. In the Mari painting, this framework is quite literally the band of running spirals, which cannot be divorced from conceptions of cyclicity by virtue of its very formal characteristics (Figs. 2, 5, and 7). Cyclicity is essential to the ancient Egyptian New Kingdom representations of the nocturnal solar journey in the netherworld on account of the recurrent nature of the solar movement (Figs. 26–27). One wonders, however, if in both compositional systems there are elements that also subvert or defy this cyclicity.

TEMPORAL CYCLICALITY IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA

In ancient Mesopotamia, a basic sense of cyclicity is embedded in the *Sumerian King List*. The *King List* depicts kingship as an institution of celestial origin, lowered from heaven.¹ A singular phenomenon, it is held only by one of the cities of Babylonia at a time. It revolves around these cities periodically, sometimes returning to a city that previously held it. Even though not as philosophically transparent as, for example, the Vedic cycles of time, the *yugas*, this scheme is characterized by numeric formulations of years of reign as well as by a revolving shift.² The only interruption in this sequence of cities

receiving kingship one after another is caused by the Flood, when kingship is apparently taken back to heaven by the gods, since it is lowered from heaven again after the Flood.

In the part of the *King List* that comes after the Flood, each city that holds kingship is “smitten by weapons” at the time its term of kingship ends and kingship moves on to another city, resulting in a new beginning.³ When repeated, this scheme yields a recurrent sequence of destruction and re-establishment, constituting an instance of cyclical repetition at the most basic level. A comparable pattern characterized by the consecutive rise and fall of a number of unnamed rulers, with the leitmotif of conflict and destruction, can be found in the texts known as the “Akkadian Prophecies” or “Akkadian Apocalypses,” probably of twelfth-century BCE and later Babylonian origin, but inscribed on tablets from the periods of the Persian and Seleucid domination of Babylonia. In the texts, the sequence of reigns is cast in the form of *vaticinia ex eventu*, predictions after the events or pretended predictions, with possible historical allusions. The reigns mentioned are specified by numbers of years and presented as good or bad, with no clear order in the alternation of good and bad reigns.⁴

Having taken its final form during the Isin Dynasty, the *Sumerian King List* does not proceed beyond the kings of this state. The ideological significance and representational nature of the text is often acknowledged; it does not contain a realistic chronology.⁵ If the *King List* rather had a role as a “treatise” on conceptions of time and history in ancient Mesopotamia during the early second millennium BCE, there would have been among the scholars who gave it its final form an understanding as to the manner in which this sequence would have progressed, in principle, beyond the Isin Dynasty.⁶ One may ask if beyond this dynasty the sequence of a revolving kingship would have continued *ad infinitum*, or if at some point there might be another interruption in the form of a cataclysm, like the Flood.

Even though the Flood, like kingship itself, is singular in the ancient Mesopotamian historical consciousness, once it sets the paradigm for radical destruction and renewal, it is hard to rule out the likelihood that its recurrence was not considered out of the question. A consecutive question would then be whether cataclysms would be recurrent or would there come a time when a renewal following destruction would be definitive, final, and permanent, the apocalyptic perspective. Given the present emphasis on sacral time, periodic destruction and renewal, and ascent, an engagement with discussions of the apocalyptic in studying the regal art of the ancient Near East is crucial.

AN APOCALYPTIC PERSPECTIVE

The general tendency in Assyriology is not to view warmly the presence of the idea of eschatology and the apocalyptic in ancient Mesopotamia, with the

exception perhaps of the later periods, the Achaemenid Persian and Seleucid, potentially as a reaction against foreign rule.⁷ A few scholars, however, saw embedded in the “Akkadian Prophecies,” or “Akkadian Apocalypses,” especially the so-called *Uruk Prophecy*, the possible Babylonian conception of an *Endzeit* characterized by “a final, catastrophic time of troubles leading into a final and permanent *Heilzeit* under the aegis of a savior-king.”⁸ The last lines of the *Uruk Prophecy* regarding the eleventh king in the sequence read: “[Af]ter him a king, his son, will arise in Uruk and rule the four quarters. He will exercise [ruler]ship? and kingship in Uruk. His dynasty will endure forever. [The king]s of Uruk will exercise rulership like the gods.”⁹ Recent studies on the religion of ancient Mesopotamia and neighboring areas have seen Mesopotamia much more explicitly and emphatically as one of the key sources in the formulation of the apocalyptic perspectives of the Hellenistic period and beyond.¹⁰ Outside strictly Assyriological scholarship as well, studies on the apocalyptic give significant credit to the ancient Near East, especially Babylonia and Iran, as potential sources for the manifestations of this phenomenon in the Hellenistic period.¹¹

As John J. Collins puts it succinctly in relation to political thought in the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean:

[in]sofar as one might speak of a goal in history, it was the establishment of a definitive, lasting kingship. ... A Babylonian prophecy from the 6th century BCE speaks of a king who would rule the entire world and whose dynasty would stand forever and exercise authority like the gods. Later, Vergil's *Aeneid* promises Rome an *imperium* without end, and the Fourth *Eclogue* described the transformation of the earth.¹²

As stressed in the [Introduction](#), the emphasis on kingship and empire in apocalyptic modes of thinking warrants that special attention be paid to the regal art of ancient Mesopotamia and adjacent areas in their potential to express the relevant notions.¹³ In what follows, I present such an endeavor with the focus not only on Mari and Mesopotamia, but also on Egypt and Anatolia.

DEFYING CYCLICALITY THROUGH ASCENT

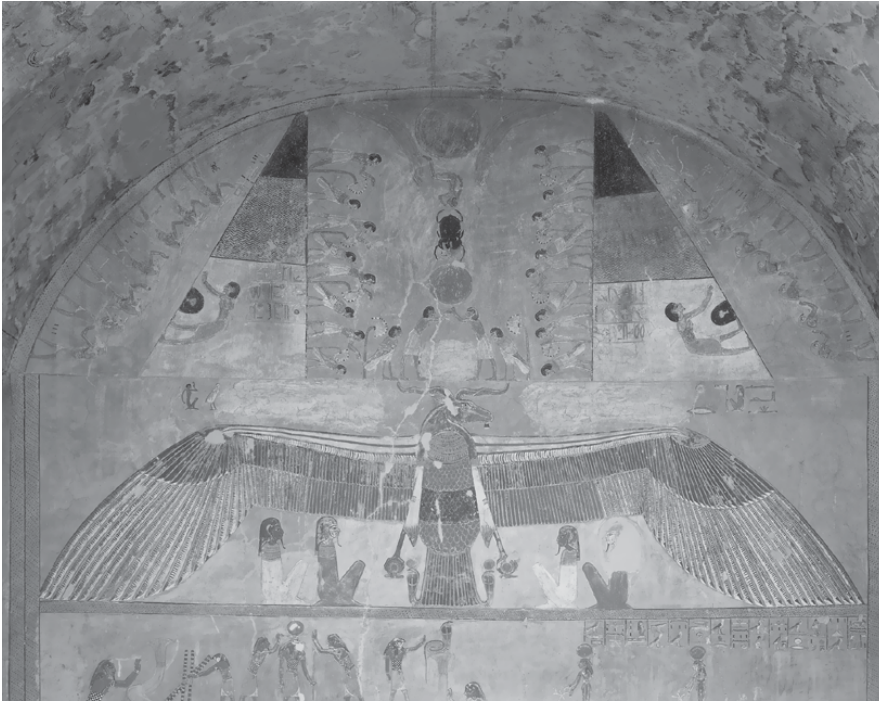
There is no Flood-like cataclysm marking a break in ancient Egyptian conceptions of sacral history. However, spells from the *Coffin Texts* dating from the Middle Kingdom as well as those from the New Kingdom *Book of the Dead* point out a future dissolution of the cosmos, whereby there would be a return to the undifferentiated state of primeval unity, consisting only of the primordial ocean, Nun, and the survival of only two gods, Atum and Osiris, in snake form.¹⁴ As we have seen, such dissolution of the cosmos and the return to the primeval state, expressed especially in aquatic and ophidian

terms, are analogous to the condition brought about by the Flood in ancient Mesopotamian myth.¹⁵ The contrast lies between the timing of the cataclysms in each culture. In ancient Mesopotamia, it is a thing of the past; in ancient Egypt, it lies in the distant future, at the inevitable collapse of the cosmos, whose duration is virtually endless, reckoned as “millions of years.”¹⁶ The contrast also lies in the potential questions generated by each case; in the Egyptian whether after the dissolution the gods would set in motion the process of creation all over again, in the Mesopotamian whether such a cataclysm would repeat itself in the future.¹⁷

The solar movement depicted in ancient Egyptian New Kingdom representations of the Books of the Netherworld is strictly cyclical, with every sunrise constituting the beginning of a new process, culminating in (re-)entrance into the netherworld. When one looks at the images of the sunrise in the representations of the *Amduat* (Fig. 26) and the *Book of Gates* (Fig. 27), as well as other emblematic scenes depicting the same process from the New Kingdom (Fig. 41), however, the whole affair is shown as if it were a special and unique incident, a miracle, that marked a definitive state or transformation. Thus, subverting or defying the recurrent cyclicity of the solar movement is the *image* of the solar ascent itself, which appears as though it were a unique or singular affair, making, in turn, each cycle of the twelve hours the representation of a singular procedure.¹⁸

Every sunrise could be the ultimate, even though the process is to go on endlessly, just as every Egyptian king who restores true order or balance (*ma'at*) to the land could do so definitively, by virtue of his office almost, in Jan Assmann's terms, as “Messiah.”¹⁹ Norman Cohn posits that “[w]orld-views that knew only of cosmos forever threatened by chaos yet always surviving – and surviving unchanged – were essentially conservative. Though they might command the allegiance of a whole society, they served especially the interests of the established authorities.”²⁰ Cohn associates the alternative, apocalyptic, view with “dissenting individuals or groups” inspired “to look forward with confidence to the day when the established order would be abolished, the existing authorities exterminated, and they themselves vindicated and exalted.”²¹ In scholarship, there is a tendency to ascribe the latter perspective to the native traditions of Mesopotamia and Egypt only when they were under the threat of foreign rule such as Persian and Hellenistic, with not enough attention paid to the likelihood that such a world view already had a genuine background within those native traditions in the form of an intellectual undercurrent, one that is not necessarily generated by contemporary socio-political crisis.²² Such intellectual undercurrents may have found their best expression in the visual arts.

In the *Amduat*, the solar ascent is represented horizontally, conforming to the overall format of the twelve hours of the night (Fig. 26). But in the *Book*



41. Wall painting showing the final scene from the ancient Egyptian Book of Caverns in the tomb of Queen Tawosret, Valley of the Kings, Thebes. Photo Credit: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

of Gates (Fig. 27) and in certain other depictions from the New Kingdom presenting the recapitulation of the entire process, such as the last hour of the *Book of Caverns* shown in a wall painting from the tomb of Queen Tawosret (Dynasty 19, 1188–1186 BCE), the vertical axis is also highlighted (Fig. 41).²³ When read against the cyclical solar scheme in which they are embedded, the semantics of the key scenes of renewal followed by ascent in the twelfth hour of the *Amduat* may be compared to the process of exiting or escaping time altogether found in the Hindu doctrine of “salvation.”²⁴ In the Indian tradition, by going backward, the *yogin* abolishes the irreversibility of time as the primary obstacle. He relives his previous existences and annihilates his previous acts and their consequences. As such, he is integrated into the principle of cosmic time, or sacral time. This integration is not the final step. The *yogin*’s ultimate aim is to exit or escape time altogether for the attainment of full-fledged “deliverance.”²⁵

In the ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian visual traditions, while the snakes and the flowing vase resonate with conceptions of sacral time as a medium through which the irreversibility of time is abolished and a state of renewal and immortality is established, the ascent proper resonates with the idea of a definitive exit from time, to which I have referred as apotheosis as shorthand.

As we have seen, in New Kingdom Egypt, the reversal is expressed in the twelfth hour of the *Amduat*, which features the rejuvenating passage through the body of the *ouroboric* serpent (Fig. 26). In ancient Mesopotamia, the classic representation of the flowing vase, with the fish swimming against the current toward the source, is the epitome of the reversal of time requisite for renewal leading to immortality (Fig. 20).

Placed within a cyclical framework, literally in the case of the Mari painting, the image of the ascent in both the “investiture” painting and the Egyptian *Amduat* may stand for the fresh phase or era of an eternally ongoing cycle on the one hand, and the definitive ascent or exit from temporal contingency altogether on the other. These two levels of signification are not conflicting or mutually exclusive. On the contrary, an ambiguity along these lines may very well have been desired by the iconographers, who would have embedded within cyclicity and endless time a notion of ultimate fulfillment. Likewise, in the Assyrian “sacred tree” panel from Ashurnasirpal II’s throne room (Fig. 3), what may essentially be an element of constant solar revolution, the winged disk, when aligned vertically with the “sacred tree,” connotes a transcendent state attained as a result of a definitive ascent to heaven.²⁶

THE HITTITE DOUBLE WINGED DISK

One of the most synoptic visual expressions of ultimate ascent in solar form in the ancient Near East comes from the Hittite world in the so-called Empire period, when the winged disk was adopted by Hittite regal art (Figs. 42–43).²⁷ On the one hand, the winged solar disk became the key element of the representation of the Hittite sun god of heaven, who has the appearance of the Hittite king as high priest and dons the motif above his head (Fig. 42).²⁸ On the other hand, the motif surmounts the name of the Hittite king in royal seals, written in Luwian hieroglyphs, and placed between symmetrically arranged logograms for great king, MAGNUS REX, sometimes also accompanied with the symmetrical logograms for the Hittite royal epithet Tabarna (Fig. 43).

Designated as the Hittite royal cartouche or the aedicula,²⁹ the composition of this inscription is structurally analogous both to the “investiture” painting from Mari (Figs. 2 and 5) and the Assyrian “sacred tree” panel from the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II (Fig. 3). Beate Pongratz-Leisten has aptly observed that the Hittite aedicula seal is an iconographic composition in addition to a visual frame for the royal name.³⁰ Muhibbe Darga had stressed how the Hittite use of the winged disk is paralleled by the Hurro-Mittanian and Assyrian visual formulae; it hovers over the anthropomorphic figure of the king *qua* sun god, which has replaced the stylized tree of its contemporary Mesopotamian counterparts.³¹ Darga regarded this configuration as the expression of a new



42. Relief showing the Hittite sun god of heaven inside *Kammer 2* of the *Südburg* at Hattusha, Hittite Empire period. From Seeher, *Hattuša Rehberi*, 102, Res. 108. Courtesy German Archaeological Institute, Boğazköy Excavation Archive.



43. Seal impression of the Hittite King Tudhaliya IV, Hittite Empire Period. Paris: Louvre. Photo Credit: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

divine formulation, one that combines god and man, a product of the Hittite imperial age, during which contact with Egypt was paramount.³²

The interchangeability of the tree and the royal image especially between winged *apkallu* figures in Neo-Assyrian art has been noted by scholars as meaningful (Figs. 3 and 33).³³ This configuration results in an equivalence between



44. Altar of Tukulti-Ninurta I from the Ishtar temple at Assur, Middle Assyrian period. Istanbul: Museum of the Ancient Orient. Photo: author.

the tree and the king, hearkening back to the age-old identity of Dumuzi/Tammuz as a vegetation god, as seen especially in the art of the Uruk and Early Dynastic periods in ancient Mesopotamia, supporting Moortgat's idea that the "Tammuz belief" lingered on in the visual arts of ancient Mesopotamia, almost as an underlying mythology, "from the beginning of the great culture of the Protohistorical Period around 3000 BC."³⁴ The idea of surmounting an anthropomorphic figure with a solar disk is also seen on one of the decorated altars of the Middle Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I, a contemporary of the Hittite king Tudhaliya IV (1237–1228 BCE), from his Ishtar Temple at Assur (Fig. 44). The relief on the altar features six-curved *lahmu* figures surmounted by solar disks rendered in the form of wheels. Although without wings, the disks are clearly solar, because one can observe in them alternating straight and wavy radials, the typical rendition of the solar disk in the art of ancient Mesopotamia (Fig. 45).³⁵ Given that the anthropomorphic figure of the Hittite sun god is identical to the priestly guise of the king, in Hittite art and hieroglyphs the winged-disk ultimately hovers over a royal signifier, figural or inscriptional.³⁶

The principal difference between the Assyrian "sacred tree" slab and the Hittite aedicula seal is the former's reduplicating the royal image and placing it on both sides of the tree surmounted by the winged disk, whereas the Hittite composition reduplicates the logogram for great king and places it on both sides of a singular hieroglyphic royal name (Figs. 3 and 43). In this respect, with its symmetrical composition evoking elements of architecture, the "investiture" painting is closer in compositional principles to the Hittite



45. Detail of Fig. 44 showing the solar disk above the head of one of the six-curbed *lahmu* figures. Photo: author.

aedicula construction, as the painting, too, features vertical elements, in this case symbolic trees, flanking an enclosure with a singular royal figure appearing in it. Even though the Hittite images do not show an elevated royal figure, the alignment and symmetrical association of the royal figure or name along the vertical with the winged disk, not to mention the upward verticality of the disk in its reduplicated version, within diagrammatic schemes is loaded with notions of ascent and apotheosis. This is particularly the case in light of the formulation of the Hittite king's death as a transformation process, "becoming a god," which must entail a transition from the earth to the celestial domain, of which the sun god is the supreme manifestation in Hittite religion, as discussed further below under the section "To Die is to Become a God."

Symmetry is an indispensable compositional element in these designs. It cannot be fortuitous that the key regal statements from Assyria, Anatolia, and Mari examined here are all governed by symmetry. Surprisingly, Moortgat posited that the reduplication of the king on both sides of the Assyrian "sacred tree" was far from meaningful, and dictated rather by formal and aesthetic concerns.³⁷ Surely, those formal and aesthetic concerns were informed by meaning, especially in light of the distinctive differences between the two sides of the Assyrian "sacred tree" composition, summarized above in [Chapter 3](#). In ancient Egyptian art, many emblematic compositions bringing elements of Upper and Lower Egypt are symmetrical, and in no other artistic tradition are instances of deviation from mirror symmetry in such designs clearer than in the Nile Valley on account of the inherent differences in the visual attributes of

Upper and Lower Egypt. Rather than a mechanically inevitable format, symmetry in these regal compositions was interculturally unanimous and likely about a deep-seated duality embedded in the philosophy of kingship, of which the terrestrial–celestial is one of the best models.

The additional gloss provided by the Hittite compositions entails the doubling of the solar disk, a rendition of the winged disk unique to this culture in its Empire period (Figs. 42–43).³⁸ Not every depiction of this motif in Empire-period Hittite art features this reduplication. But there are enough examples of it, both in glyptic and relief sculpture, for the design to be a wide-ranging signifier.³⁹ Even though the design is frequently noted as distinctive in studies of Hittite art and archaeology, there are not many endeavors to explicate its meaning. In her study on the Eflatunpınar spring monument from the later Hittite Empire period (Fig. 46), Jutta Börker-Klähn understood the dual disk as an expression of the simultaneously terrestrial and celestial formulation of Hittite sun deities in the form of the “sun god of earth” and “sun god of heaven,” associated, respectively, with the nocturnal and diurnal manifestations of the sun. Thus, the motif underscores the transition from one form of the sun to the other at dawn and dusk (Fig. 42–43).⁴⁰ This reading of the design has significant value, as it is also within contexts of solar ascent from the netherworld into the horizon, *akhet*, that the Egyptian scenes show multiple sun disks and solar symbols, such as the scarab beetle, superimposed on one another or aligned along the vertical, visible best on the wall painting inside the tomb of Tawosret in the Valley of the Kings (Fig. 41).



46. The Eflatunpınar spring monument, Hittite Empire period. Photo: author.

Beyond the cyclical transition between day and night, however, the doubling of the Hittite sun disk must also be a condensed signifier of movement along the vertical, implying ultimate or definitive ascent to heaven or to a level of transcendent deity, and by extension an exit from all temporal contingency. Being altogether outside the frame defined by the wings, the second disk placed above the primary sun overrides solar cyclicity (Figs. 42–43). This second disk may be a visual device on the part of the Hittite iconographer to make visible the supra-solar, or astral, element encrypted in the solar image. I have argued above that embedded already in images of ascent presented in cyclical form may be implications of ultimate exit or escape from cyclicity.⁴¹ The Hittite double sun disk in a way opens up or parses out that potential, which lies ordinarily suppressed within a single image of the winged solar disk. In other words, it is as though the sun all by itself were only the final means to the ultimate transcendent, or astral, stage, which is attained as a result of a passage through and beyond the sun.

The reduplicated Hittite disk is unique in the art of the ancient Near East in showing openly that astral or transcendent stage, which lies ordinarily encrypted or suppressed in the supreme solar symbol. An excellent further confirmation of, or gloss on, this particular signification of the double winged disk comes again



47. Stela from Malatya (Melid) showing the storm god and the sun goddess facing each other under the double winged disk, Neo-Hittite period. Ankara: Museum of Anatolian Civilizations. Photo: C. Akça Ataç.

from the site of Arslantepe/Melid from the beginning of the Late Hittite period, a stela that shows in relief the enthroned weather god and the sun goddess facing one another with the double winged disk hovering above them (Fig. 47). While the first disk is rendered as a regular winged solar disk, the second disk surmounting it is in the form of the Luwian hieroglyph for god, DEUS. Although a singular example, this image does show the presence in Hittite culture of the perception that the second disk connotes the rise to full-fledged divinity.

HITTITE VISUAL FORMULATIONS OF ASCENT

In addition to the aedicula seal design and the winged disk, Hittite monuments of the Empire period are connected further with the symbolism of ancient Mesopotamian monuments in their emphasis on aquatic images and concepts. Among the Hittites as well, there existed an understanding of underground sources of water and the spots where they appeared on the surface of the earth as entrances into a world beyond, the ^DKASKAL.KURs.⁴² Some of these sacred spots were marked with architectural constructions depicting them as vaulted doorways, seen at the imperial capital Hattusha.⁴³ With its eclectic pantheon including many gods from a number of ancient western Asian traditions, Hittite religion included the figure of the Mesopotamian god Enki/Ea and the element of the Apsû. The Hittite emphasis on subterranean sources of water may be concordant with this god's presence in Hittite religious consciousness.⁴⁴ The important Mesopotamian elements incorporated in an original manner into Hittite culture at the level of the cuneiform tradition, religion, and the visual arts, are often highlighted by scholars.⁴⁵ The inspiration for the aquatic component in Hittite art and architecture was no doubt largely derived from the geography and landscape of Anatolia as well as the Hittites' own unique sources for their religion.⁴⁶ But one should not neglect to see the ancient Mesopotamian cosmological perspective as another crucial reference in this regard.⁴⁷

The link between a Hittite terrestrial aquatic domain and its celestial counterpart is observed best in one of the monumental symbolic vaulted entrances into the netherworld in the Upper City of Hattusha, the *Kammer 2* of the *Südburg*, built in connection with one of the great water reservoirs, or sacred pools, of the imperial capital (Fig. 42). The structure was constructed in the time of Shuppiluliuma II (1207–? BCE), whose hieroglyphic inscription is carved on one of its lateral walls.⁴⁸ The inscription mentions the phrase ^DKASKAL.KUR, or (DEUS)VIA+TERRA, which again “means an underground watercourse, perceived by the Hittites as one of the roads into the netherworld.”⁴⁹ Despite its association with subterranean and aquatic concepts, the vaulted room features a magnificent representation in relief sculpture of the sun god wearing the double winged disk above his head (Fig. 42). A scheme of ascent is clearly

embedded in this design, with the entrance into the vaulted space connoting access to the terrestrial “antechamber” of a realm beyond, whence there exists further transition to a celestial domain signaled by the sun god.

MOUNTAIN AND WATER

There are other examples of Hittite art and monuments with connotations of ascent. They feature a terrestrial realm on the bottom of multi-tier compositions, such as the bronze ceremonial axe said to be from Şarkışla, the so-called Fasillar monument, the rock-relief at İmamkulu, not to mention the rock reliefs in Shrine A of the Yazılıkaya open-air sanctuary, just outside Hattusha, depicting the encounter between the storm god and his consort, as well as Tudhaliya IV as high priest (Fig. 48), all standing upon mountains or mountain gods.⁵⁰ One of the best examples demonstrating this idiom is again the Eflatunpınar spring monument (Fig. 46), the compositional and figural resemblance of which to the Hittite royal aedicula seal has been noted by Börker-Klähn and revisited by Pongratz-Leisten.⁵¹ A further connection is drawn here between water and mountain deities, invariably rendered in Hittite art with the age-old ancient Mesopotamian mountain scale pattern.⁵²



48. Rock relief showing Tudhaliya IV as high priest standing on mountains from Shrine A of the Yazılıkaya open air sanctuary outside Hattusha, Hittite Empire period. Photo: author.

The connection between water and “mountain,” which, in turn, stands for the netherworld in ancient Mesopotamian cosmology,⁵³ is clear in many ancient Mesopotamian works of art and monuments, especially from the Late Bronze Age, such as the Innin Temple of Karaindash at Uruk from the Middle Babylonian (Kassite) period, where mountain deities are depicted holding the flowing vase.⁵⁴ Further examples include representatives of the so-called second Kassite style, or the “attractive style,” in glyptic featuring a mountain deity, water, and the flowing vase;⁵⁵ the well-known stela from Assur, in great likelihood a Mittanian work of art, showing a mountain god of vegetation, perhaps the god Ashur himself, flanked by water deities;⁵⁶ and the Middle Assyrian ivory panel found at Assur, mentioned in [Chapter 2](#) in relation to the quadrangular configuration of the flowing vases held by a mountain god.⁵⁷ Finally, we should note how certain representations of the Mittanian and Assyrian “sacred trees,” especially in glyptic, feature the tree growing out of a triangular mound rendered with the mountain scale pattern ([Figs. 12](#) and [31](#)). As we have observed in [Chapters 1](#) and [3](#), some of these Assyrian representations incorporate into this configuration the flowing vase as well ([Fig. 31](#)).⁵⁸ The conflation or confusion of the Apsû with the netherworld in ancient Mesopotamian texts, especially in the first millennium BCE, is also conceptually commensurate with the connection among water, “mountain,” and the netherworld.⁵⁹

Frankfort pointed out the concept of “mountain” as a religious construct of many-sided significance in ancient Mesopotamian art and thought, both in its capacity to stand for the entire earth, and in its constituting a link between the earth and heaven, including phenomena such as rain, storm, and fertility. He rightly linked the ziggurat, or the elevated temple, with this consciousness.⁶⁰ Frankfort further identified “mountain,” expressed in the visual arts especially by the mountain scale pattern, as the quintessential ancient Mesopotamian locale for divine manifestation. To that end, he gave the example of the Early Dynastic votive plaque depicting the goddess Ninhursag *en face*, stepping on ground rendered with this particular visual treatment, as well as that of the Burney relief, which depicts a goddess, perhaps Ishtar or Ereshkigal, holding two sets of the ring and rod and similarly standing on a ground line rendered with the mountain scale pattern.⁶¹ Thus, rather than a motif denoting simply mountainous landscape or terrain in a prosaic sense, the mountain scale pattern must emphatically be thought of as having cosmological and religious meaning in the visual arts of ancient Mesopotamia and the neighboring areas that adopted it.⁶²

In the Eflatunpınar spring monument, the aquatic terrestrial realm rendered through mountain deities support an upper level of supreme deities, in great likelihood the Hittite storm god and the sun goddess, flanked by mythological beings supporting winged disks, all surmounted by one gigantic winged disk ([Fig. 46](#)). The presence of a gradation from the terrestrial to the

ultimate celestial in this monument, suggestive of cosmic hierarchy and ascent, is commensurate with the larger Late Bronze artistic idiom shared by the Hittite, Mittanian, and Assyrian traditions incorporating royal figures, winged beings, trees, and winged disks within symmetrical formulaic compositions. Such gradation is also clear in the depiction of Tudhaliya IV on the rock relief in Shrine A of the Yazılıkaya sanctuary (Fig. 48). Having stepped on two “mountains,” the king in his priestly garb is shown in association with his own aedicula seal surmounted by the double winged disk. The composition is again loaded with implications of ascent and apotheosis.⁶³

In the Eflatunpınar spring monument (Fig. 46), we see an additional link to the Mari painting through aquatic imagery. The Mari painting features an aquatic basement for an upper level of supreme celestial divinity, regardless of the absence of the winged disk (Figs. 2 and 5). The painting further depicts this aquatic basement as a medium of transition or doorway to a realm beyond. Its lateral panels incorporate the mountain scale pattern and parallel those of the Hittite spring monument through its ascending tiers featuring mythical beings.⁶⁴ Once again, we observe how the Mari painting does not exist in a vacuum and how it is foundational and ancestral to a later intercultural Bronze Age artistic tradition, which, in turn, is the background to the art of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

TO DIE IS TO BECOME A GOD

The final codification of Hittite regal art, with its emphasis on the winged disk, “mountain,” aquatic or not, a visual hierarchy along the vertical, and the occurrence of the *ankh* sign in imagery, takes place in the Empire period.⁶⁵ Within this time frame, the greater concentration of images stems from the reign of Tudhaliya IV. Scholars tend to date the Eflatunpınar spring monument to his reign as well.⁶⁶ Known for his religious reforms especially in matters of the cult and the pantheon, Tudhaliya IV evidently brought Hittite regal art in closer alignment with that of contemporary Mesopotamia and Egypt in the visual expression of conceptions of cosmology, ascent, and universal rule.⁶⁷ In other words, beyond the cultic, Tudhaliya’s religious reforms may have tapped the metaphysical dimension embedded in the kind of imagery we have been tracing in the artistic traditions of second- and first-millennium BCE states of the Near East. His assuming the age-old Mesopotamian royal title *šar kiššati*, king of the world,⁶⁸ is another indication of Tudhaliya’s claims to universal rule in an international language.

Even though the Hittite king was not considered divine during his lifetime, he became a god when he died. The phrase in Hittite for the royal death is to “become a god.”⁶⁹ During the thirteenth century, the era of Hattushili III (1267–1237 BCE) and Tudhaliya IV, there seems to have existed a tendency

to deify the king “already during his lifetime or to confer upon him at least certain privileges that were formerly only reserved for gods.”⁷⁰ The doubled version of the Hittite winged disk is perhaps the most mystical formulation of this motif available within the art of the ancient Near East, conveying most legibly the equation “to die is to ascend is to become a god.” As stressed earlier, the phenomena behind such images may not have been exclusively mortuary or ideological in a politico-religious sense. They may also be shamanic or mystical, pertinent to a special individual’s step-by-step progress out of this side of time on a path that ultimately leads to a transcendent beyond.⁷¹

In the Hittite paradigm, the exit from the sun is shown in greater explicitness by means of the second disk surmounting the first.⁷² Since we are here dealing with imperial governments with a sense of history embedded in their cultures as well, the semantic behind their official images is no doubt also historical in laying out in dense diagrammatic form a sense of macro or universal history. This sense of history would have been commensurate with imperial ideologies of stretching political borders, universalizing imperial rule, and ultimately transfiguring the world, shared among the great empires of the ancient Near East of the second and first millennia BCE.⁷³ In fact, what we often refer to as “universal rule” in the study of ancient Near Eastern empires and their ideologies would not make much sense beyond mere hyperbole, unless that rule is construed as all-encompassing, perfect, and eternal, and hence again the apocalyptic paradigm.

EGYPTIAN ROOTS

What I have designated as supra-solar or astral is a dimension brought out in a solar symbol overriding the cyclicity of ordinary solar revolution. In introducing the discussion of the Hittite double winged disk, I have already pointed to vertical configurations of the Egyptian sunrise from the New Kingdom as potential expressions of such rise to an ultimate astral level embedded in the depiction of an ordinarily cyclical phenomenon, the solar ascent from the netherworld every morning (Figs. 27 and 41). A conception of the supra-solar expressed through the visual medium may be found in the early stages of ancient Egyptian art as well, in what is perhaps a unique depiction on an ivory comb, part of the funerary assemblage of King Cobra from Dynasty I (ca. 3000–2890 BCE) in the Early Dynastic period (ca. 3000–2686 BCE) (Fig. 49). The image carved on the comb shows an enclosure with the Horus name of the king written in it, the *serekh*, surmounted as always by the Horus falcon. The uniqueness of this depiction lies in this Horus falcon’s being surmounted by another falcon, in smaller scale, in a celestial boat floating on a gigantic pair of wings. The wings span the horizontal distance established by the hieroglyphs for dominion, *was*, flanking the *serekh*,



49. Egyptian ivory comb from the tomb of the Cobra King (Dynasty 1), Abydos, Early Dynastic period. Cairo: Egyptian Museum. From Engelbach, "An Alleged Winged Sun-Disk," Tafel 8.

again in a manner commensurate with the semiotics of "historical" frames.⁷⁴ As is the case with the Mari painting, even though the composition is largely symmetrical, rigid symmetry is avoided through the inclusion of the sign for life, *ankh*, only on one side of the *serekh*.

Here, too, the second Horus in the boat brings out the supra-solar dimension embedded in the *serekh* construction. Like the upper disk of the Hittite double winged disk, this second Horus, especially since he is in a boat, is indicative of ascent to heaven. The fact that he is above an image that is already solar communicates the supra-solar or astral.⁷⁵ In the Mari painting, in the absence of a winged disk, the blue bird depicted in flight in the upper zone of the trees framing the central panel may be the equivalent visual signal of the rise to transcendence (Figs. 2, 5, and 28). As proposed for the Hittite winged disk, the *serekh* surmounted by the Horus falcon all by itself may already encompass the idea of ultimate deity and ascent leading to a permanent and transcendent status. This unique image from the Egyptian Early Dynastic period shows the open form of an otherwise suppressed or encrypted signification. As is the case with the stela from Arslantepe/Melid that features the sign for god in lieu of the upper sun of the Hittite double winged disk (Fig. 47), sometimes "all it takes" is one image, as long as it is authentic, to reveal a fundamental parameter

about the significance of motifs or designs that we come to perceive as quite common and neutral in the art of the greater ancient Near East.

With its resemblance in compositional and semantic principles both to the Mari painting and the Hittite aedicula seal, as well as its antiquity, this Egyptian image speaks to the limitations of confining discussions of visual ideas to rigid chronological divisions. It reveals the importance of diachronic and cross-cultural perspectives in the study of the timeless language of the art of the ancient Near East, which is much longer-standing than we are apt to think. This object reveals ancient Egyptian modes of visual thinking and uses of hieroglyphs as “‘sense’ or ‘meaning indicators’ rather than as phonetic reading signs.”⁷⁶ Through comparison with formulaic representations from Mari and the Hittite Empire, it also sheds light on how cultures of the ancient Near East exploited this particular power of images as an authoritative source of religious information.

With its roots in ancient Egypt, the winged disk in essence is the symbol of the god Horus, who, in addition to being a solar god, is the god of the reigning king and that of kingship.⁷⁷ As the god associated with the reigning king, he has on the one hand a connection with temporal power and the individual who holds this office, in contrast to the funerary deity par excellence, Osiris, who is connected with the netherworld, the hidden, and time outside time. On the other hand, Horus in his incarnation as a god of heaven is the god of the ultimate celestial destiny, who may be considered even beyond Osiris.⁷⁸ As the Old Kingdom *Pyramid Texts* explicitly state, the celestial destiny for the king is far more desirable than an Osirian eternity.⁷⁹ With its implications of longevity and fertility, the Osirian eternity is the foundation for this celestial ascent.

Pongratz-Leisten has rightly emphasized the interconnectedness of the regal visual vocabularies of the Late Bronze Age polities of the Near East as a manifestation of shared notions of universal rule, both at the level of government and at the level of a head deity who ranked above and beyond all others, such as the sun god Amun-Re in New Kingdom Egypt and Ashur in Assyria.⁸⁰ Previously, Moortgat had also stressed the shared visual language of the Hurro-Mittanian and Hittite worlds as the foundation for the hieratic aspects of Assyrian art, consisting especially of winged disks, stylized trees, and winged mythical figures.⁸¹ All these three cultures, Hittite, Mittanian, and Assyrian, had empires in the Late Bronze Age. Furthermore, as attested by the Amarna Letters, they were all in touch with the Egyptian Empire, the source not only of the winged disk as a motif, but probably also of conceptions of transcendence expressed in solar form.⁸²

If the Assyrian winged disk represents the god Ashur in solar form, the motif in Assyria should also be thought to go hand in hand with the attempt to “transcendentalize” this god by means of associating him with a distant

primordial deity, AN.ŠÁR.⁸³ Commonly thought of as a political device on the part of Sennacherib to elevate the Assyrian national deity over the Babylonian ruler god Marduk in the Neo-Assyrian period, this act may have played into a much more fundamental theological discourse on transcendence. In fact, even though the spelling AN.ŠÁR for the Assyrian national god in the Neo-Assyrian period occurs “for the first time in the inscriptions of Sargon II, and assumes a systematic character under the reign of his son and successor, Sennacherib,” “the equation was already known in the Middle Assyrian period,”⁸⁴ during the great intercultural era of the Late Bronze Age. As such, a transcendent perception of the god Ashur may have its roots in the Late Bronze Age, in the era during which the Egyptian solar god Amun-Re clearly acquired enhanced qualities of universality and transcendence in the aftermath of the Amarna period.⁸⁵ In this respect, rather than merely an attempt to lift the Assyrian god above the Babylonian god Marduk during the reign of Sennacherib for purposes of politico-religious superiority, the spelling of the god Ashur as AN.ŠÁR, a primeval god, may have tapped a genuine and deep-seated Late Bronze Age conception of transcendence associated with supreme deity, visualized in the form of the winged solar disk. The conception of a superior transcendent god may be considered to go hand in hand with an eschatological scheme whereby the end of history, or the *telos*, falls in the domain of that very deity.

CONCEPTIONS OF TEMPORAL AND ASTRAL ETERNITY

It is true that in Mesopotamia the first cuneiform sign used to describe the word “god” is the image of a star.

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The common iconographic characteristics of the key images of the Late Bronze Age empires of the Near East live on in the Assyrian “sacred tree” panel from the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud (Fig. 3). In turn, their principles of composition and signification are prefigured or heralded best by the Mari painting in the preceding Middle Bronze Age. Within this framework, one could talk about two different formulations of eternity shared at least by ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, and expressed in art. The first would be that of the endlessness or inexhaustibility of time, an eternity at home in a beyond within the cosmos, be it the ancient Egyptian netherworld and its relation to the solar cycle, be it the land of edenic permanence associated with the ancient Mesopotamian Apsû. The second would be one characterized by the abolishment of all time, a definitive exit from time, a transcendent eternity, an atemporal present, eternity in the proper sense of the word.⁸⁷

In both ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, it is the first kind of eternity that is readily available as a concept in the written sources. Especially in ancient Egypt, the recurrent solar cycle itself was seen as a perennial and unchanging state, a continually accomplished eschatology, to which the deceased aspired.⁸⁸ In ancient Mesopotamia, as well, time and history are thought of as stretching *ad infinitum*.⁸⁹ As for the second formulation, that of a transcendent eternity, it may have been treated as a vastly more restricted idea, expressed primarily in the visual arts, in select imagery sponsored by the crown for its key regal spaces, such as we have been analyzing.⁹⁰ According to Hornung, it is a short step from eternity understood as the endlessness of time in a beyond within the cosmos, expressed through the Egyptian concepts of *djet* and *neheh*, to eternity as being beyond or out of time altogether.⁹¹ Hornung sees the latter in ancient Egypt solely in the pre-creation or non-manifest state of the cosmos, which is briefly recreated daily in the dangerous encounter between the sun god and the serpent Apophis at the midpoint of the nocturnal journey as well as at midday in heaven, when time comes to a standstill.⁹²

Notwithstanding, or side by side with, the pre-creation, or non-manifest, state of the cosmos, implications or traces of transcendent eternity may be found in ancient Egypt in the astral conceptions of the beyond, especially in relation to the concept of the *akh*, transfigured spirit, and its co-extensiveness with the northern circumpolar stars, which never rise or set.⁹³ These notions belong to the earliest pyramid age before Dynasty 4 (2613–2494 BCE) and encountered in written form in the *Pyramid Texts*, perhaps already revised in light of the prevalent contemporary solar concepts.⁹⁴ But their intellectual ramifications in ancient Egyptian religion may not stop there.⁹⁵ The astral implications of the solar ascent both in Hittite and Egyptian visual formulae, coupled with the transcendent overtones of solar religion in the New Kingdom in the aftermath of the Amarna period, speak to the presence among these cultures as well of a notion of transcendent eternity.

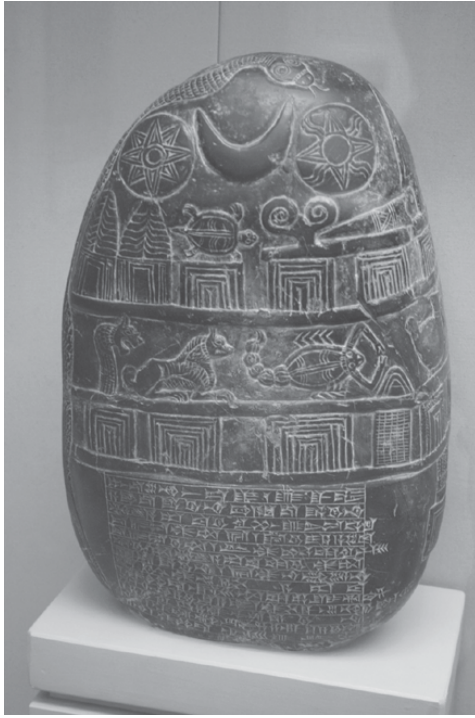
In ancient Mesopotamia, too, even earlier than the Late Bronze Age, references to ascent to heaven in relation to the death of certain Ur III and Isin kings may be considered indications of an astral outlet from temporal contingency. Particularly intriguing in this regard is the reference to a “Shulgi star,”^{mul} *ḫulgi*, “in the star-section of Old Babylonian ‘Forerunners to Urra’ (*MSL* XI 133 viii 41.138 rev. ii 2’).”⁹⁶ The second, transcendent or astral, understanding of eternity may have been shared consciously and collectively by the intellectual perspectives of the imperial polities of the Late Bronze Age, Egypt, Mittani, Hatti, and Assyria, especially as expressed in visual form through motifs such as the winged solar disk and its derivatives, with roots, however, in remoter Mesopotamian and Egyptian antiquity.

NOTHING BABYLONIAN

Both Moortgat and Pongratz-Leisten stated that there was nothing Babylonian in the Assyrian “sacred tree” surmounted by the winged disk and the Hittite and Mittanian imagery that constituted the background to this composition.⁹⁷ In terms of Moortgat’s overarching concept of the “Tammuz belief,” the tree surmounted by the winged disk, the hallmark of Kerkuk glyptic, constituted a break from the art of the age of Hammurapi.⁹⁸ It brought back the Tammuz of the Sumero-Akkadian era, having now merged him with the sun. Although these statements are by and large accurate, a (re)consideration of the Mari painting in its structural and semantic affinities to the Late Bronze Age visual traditions points to stronger threads of connection between the art of the Late Bronze Age and its Middle Bronze Age backdrop, a heritage that already entails significant interconnectedness among Anatolia, northern Mesopotamia, Babylonia, and Egypt. With its almost encyclopedic figural and ornamental repertoire, the Mari painting is symptomatic of a wider-ranging artistic and intellectual continuity between Babylonia and northern Mesopotamia and its neighbors, while speaking also to the relevance both of Egypt and the Aegean to the study of the visual language of the ancient Near East, especially in the second millennium BCE.

To summarize the findings and interpretations so far, the upper register of the central panel of the Mari painting may be thought to signal a state of exiting all temporal contingency and stepping into a transcendent astral eternity, expressed through the model of the royal presence in a celestial domain (Figs. 2, 5, and 7). As the only area of the painting in the determinate semantic mode, it depicts a permanent status, resulting in an ultimate and lasting ascent and apotheosis. In turn, it is set against the backdrop of a mechanism of renewal and immortalization in a terrestrial beyond, represented by the lower register and the outer scene, with their implications of an indefinitely stretching temporality. The regenerative capacity of this endless and divine source of time, or time outside time, is evoked most cogently in ornamental form by the band of running spirals, the ancient Mesopotamian, or the Old Babylonian Mari, equivalent of the ancient Egyptian *ouroboros*.

The cosmic nature of the state or experience represented by the “investiture” scene is signaled through the presence in it of the goddess Ishtar, and hence the star Venus. Along with the sun and the moon, Ishtar in her stellar manifestation as Venus is one of the three principal celestial bodies associated with supreme divinity in ancient Mesopotamia. In the visual domain, all three are shown aligned as celestial signs in the uppermost fields of commemorative stelae from the second and first millennia BCE, sometimes joined by other divine symbols, such as the horned crowns of the sky god Anu and Enlil, the thunderbolt of the storm god Adad, and the seven dots standing for the



50. *Kudurrû* of Eanna-shum-iddina, governor of the Sea-Land in southern Babylonia, showing astral signs, Middle Babylonian period. London: British Museum. Photo: author.

Pleiades.⁹⁹ Examples of Middle Babylonian *kudurrûs* (Fig. 50), the stone tablet of Nabu-apla-iddina from the ninth century BCE, and the stelae of Nabonidus from the Neo-Babylonian period all feature the three principal celestial symbols aligned in the apexes of their compositions.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, it is often these three principal celestial gods who are privy to the conferral of the ring and rod on the royal figure in the visual record. In this respect, all these three celestial bodies, solar, lunar, and stellar, can also be astral inasmuch as they reference notions of transcendence.

The earliest extant visual solution for the expression of the astral through the solar in ancient Mesopotamia may be found in the well-known Stela of Naram-Sîn, also the earliest extant monument featuring notions of royal divinization in ancient western Asia. In this composition, through the multiplication of the solar disk, the sun is treated as though it were a star; multiple suns create an unrealistic, and hence supra-cosmic, milieu in the upper field of the stela, perhaps paralleled on earth by the unnaturally steep mound that rises in front of the royal figure. Based on Börker-Klähn's reconstruction of the composition on the stela as featuring seven celestial bodies,¹⁰¹ Joan Westenholz read the signs as the star group Pleiades.¹⁰² In her study of the stela, however, Irene Winter questioned the reconstructed number of the celestial signs, stating that

there could be as few as three.¹⁰³ Furthermore, she drew attention to the wavy radials alternating with the triangular inside the disks, ascertaining that we are here dealing with suns, not stars.¹⁰⁴

Regardless of whether or not there were more than three suns in the upper field of the stela, a middle ground between Westenholz and Winter would be to see the suns treated here as though they were stars; and hence an ingenious device on the part of the sculptor of the stela of bringing out the transcendent, or astral, in the solar. This the Hittite double winged disk achieves by multiplying the disk as well, but in the minimal possible manner, contiguous reduplication along the vertical, with connotations of rise, ascent, and divinization, the same concepts possibly conveyed by the Akkadian stela. As the foundation for notions of universal rule and divine kingship in ancient western Asia,¹⁰⁵ the Akkadian Dynasty may already have explored in its visual arts the interplay between the solar and the astral in the codification of royal imagery. In this respect, it may be in parallelism with the ancient Egyptian exploration in theology of the same interplay during the age of pyramids around the middle of the third millennium BCE.

Even though solar gods, or ruler gods cast in solar guise, dominate the religious and visual scene of the ancient Near East throughout the Late Bronze and Iron Ages, in the later phases of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, the moon god Sîn as well assumes, albeit for a limited period of time and not without resistance from the Marduk orthodoxy, supreme status equivalent to that possessed by solar or solarized gods of the Late Bronze Age polities of the ancient Near East.¹⁰⁶ Being in the triad along with the sun and the moon, Ishtar as a stellar entity, Venus, would certainly qualify as a supreme astral deity in the visual expression of celestial transcendence in the “investiture” painting, in an artistic tradition in which the winged solar disk did not exist.¹⁰⁷

To sum up, embedded within the ostensibly strict cyclicity of time in ancient Near Eastern cultures may be notions of final time or an end to time. Such notions may have found emblematic expression in the regal art of the ancient Near East, particularly in the second and first millennia BCE. In this respect, rather than drawing a polarization between cyclical and linear time, we should see cyclicity as the proper background to a break therefrom,¹⁰⁸ expressed in the form of an ultimate, astral, and lasting regal order, an ideal state as opposed to a realistic or scheduled expectation.¹⁰⁹

CONCEPTIONS OF APOCALYPTIC ESCHATOLOGY

In the *Sumerian King List*, we see semantic indeterminacy in the seemingly unpredictable course of kingship as it revolves around a number of cities, including Mari, and the open-endedness of a potential progression beyond

the Isin Dynasty. As for semantic determinacy, we see it in the very celestial nature of kingship, a divine establishment possessed and conferred by the gods, like the ring and rod. No matter how long it may remain revolving around on earth, kingship belongs to heaven, and it is lowered from heaven. We have seen that a path of ascent to heaven is present in the ancient Mesopotamian religious consciousness, perhaps materialized most clearly in the form of the ziggurat.

With their emphasis on the vertical axis, both the Mari painting (Figs. 2 and 5) and the “sacred tree” panel of Ashurnasirpal II (Fig. 3) are visual conceptualizations of processes of ascent represented through the figure of the king. At the same time, these images possibly had collective and historical implications. In other words, what on one level stands for a process of ascent and “deliverance” applicable to the ancient Mesopotamian equivalent of a *yogin*-like individual, the royal figure, stands on another level for a historical progression toward an ultimately and definitively renewed cosmos. Eliade points out how the shaman, “when he reaches the summit of the cosmic tree, in the last heaven, also in a manner asks the ‘future’ of the community and the ‘fate’ of the soul.”¹¹⁰ The connection between the summit and the future in the shamanic ascent resonates both with the present focus on individual destiny, especially the liberation by means of an ascending track, and that on the future of the cosmos in the collective sense implied by the apocalyptic.¹¹¹ It also resonates with the emphasis on prophecy and divination in the Mari and Assyrian courts. Both in the Mari painting and the throne room “sacred tree” slab from Nimrud, the king may be seen as receiving from the gods the ultimate oracle, the knowledge of the definitive future renewal of the cosmos.

The Flood narratives from ancient Mesopotamia are not at all concerned with the state of the earth and humanity after the Flood. Rather, they address the establishment of a terrestrial realm of blessedness and its immortal but human inhabitant. It is the liminal and occluded status of this realm of longevity that calls for the question whether there would have been in the same metaphysical thinking an upgraded foil to this domain in the form of a manifest, all-encompassing, and permanent renewal that is still pending.¹¹² One may think that there is no written attestation not only in the Old Babylonian period but also in entire ancient Mesopotamian history to the presence of such an explicit apocalyptic paradigm. Not to be passed over lightly, nevertheless, is the *Uruk Prophecy*, quoted above, prescribing an eternal dynasty for Uruk with kings reigning like gods. Also crucial in this regard are statements of everlasting permanence found in the Old Babylonian royal inscriptions wishing the king a firm reign, an eternal reign, the exercise of kingship forever, a throne with a secure foundation, the rule of the four quarters forever.¹¹³ Even if such designations are viewed as clichés or instances of hyperbole, they still contain, in principle, the idea of making a reign or rule perfect, permanent, stable, unchanging,

and all encompassing, all by nature determinate concepts and hallmarks of the apocalyptic.¹¹⁴ As such, not even written evidence for the apocalyptic is unequivocally non-existent in the ancient Mesopotamian record.

The laconic character of this written evidence does not amount to the absence of a wider-ranging speculation on the apocalyptic among court intellectuals. Such speculation may have been esoteric in nature, not suitable to be put into discursive writing, and instead expressed more effectively in diagrammatic images such as the Mari painting and the Assyrian “sacred tree” panel from the Northwest Palace throne room at Nimrud.¹¹⁵ In the final analysis, we may have in the Mari painting the earliest extant apocalyptic image in history, with its close counterpart located in Assyria, about a thousand years later, with countless images from Egypt, Anatolia, and northern Mesopotamia resonating with relevant notions in between and beyond.

The Babylonian historical tradition of the first half of the second millennium BCE saw the office of kingship itself (*nam-lugal*) as permanent and everlasting, in contrast to its term or exercise (*bala*), which it saw subject to continual change. As the well-known verses from the *Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur*, a product of Old Babylonian scribal culture, read: “Ur was indeed given kingship (but) it was not given an eternal reign. / From time immemorial, since the land was founded, until the population multiplied, / Who has ever seen a reign of kingship that would take precedence (for ever)? / The reign of its kingship had been long indeed but had to exhaust itself.”¹¹⁶ As the sheer antithesis to this statement, the phrases wishing the Old Babylonian king an eternal reign or the exercise of kingship forever abolish the distinction between kingship and its term of exercise even if in a cliché or hyperbole.¹¹⁷ While the idea of making perfect and permanent is determinate, what may generate indeterminate perspectives are the questions of when in the future such an ideal or divine kingship might lie; whether such an ideal state is ever attainable; and if it is, whether once attained there is not even the infinitesimal likelihood that it is to change again.¹¹⁸

I should like to submit that it was the genius of the Mari painter, through his use of the indeterminate mode, that put to visual form a matter of great complexity belonging to a possible intellectual speculation on time, history, and eschatology in his court culture.

Through the indeterminate mode, the painter does not subvert the likely eschatological statement embedded in his imagery. Rather, he may be expressing through this mode the indefinitely unfulfilled status of terrestrial or primeval longevity or the indefinite duration of any progression toward a potentially ultimate and perfected state of the cosmos. Thus, the Mari painter may be making visible a conundrum inherent in the systems of eschatological thought in which he operates. It is the indeterminate mode that imparts on this painting its great charm, through the enormous bird that is perpetually in

flight or perpetually about to alight, and the aquatic doorway that perpetually extends into a passage that leads seemingly nowhere. By contrast, within the limited emblematic format that they utilize, the Hittite and Assyrian renditions of the winged disk have no room for visual or semantic ambiguity in the concepts they express. In the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II, indeterminacy may rather lie in the seemingly endless chain of battles, in which chariots charge, bows are drawn, and arrows shot (Fig. 14), as time and history unfold phase after phase around the walls of the throne room, without any clear climactic end or teleological outcome, which, in turn, the winged disk alighting the “sacred tree” presents as a firm idea (Figs. 3 and 13).¹¹⁹

CLOSURE TO THE MARI PAINTING

There clearly is a semantic content both in the Mari painting and the throne room “sacred tree” panel of Ashurnasirpal II that goes beyond matters of coronation, conferral of regalia on the king, royal power, legitimacy, fertility, and the king’s upholding the cosmic order. Works of art of the ancient Near East of the quality and sophistication of these examples were the products of a high-level intellectual activity that put to figural representation knowledge of an arcane character. I have argued that this knowledge would have entailed an almost prophetic speculation on the past and the future both from the perspective of the individual or human destiny expressed through the figure of the king and from that of primeval history and eschatology. At the heart of this speculation lie on the one hand the process of an individual’s complete exit or escape from time and all its contingencies, a veritable apotheosis; and on the other that of an ultimate renewal of the cosmos that would put a definitive end to all historical progression, expressed through the establishment of a permanent and all-pervasive regal order, signaled in the visual arts of the ancient Near East through certain key renditions of the winged disk and the conferral of the ring and rod.

Conceptions of all-encompassing royal or imperial orders meant to be stretched to the edges of the earth were certainly part of the state ideologies of world empires such as the Assyrian and Roman.¹²⁰ Such political statements plausibly had metaphysical backgrounds that served on the one hand scholarly purposes and on the other those of the state. In ancient Mesopotamia, even though we do not see a world empire in the proper sense of the word before Assyria, the roots of such intellectual and political perspectives reach back to earlier times, finding expression already in the courts and royal rhetorics of the Old Babylonian period, perhaps with deeper foundations in Akkadian antiquity.

Being out of time and out of history would also entail a super-human knowledge of the past, present, and future.¹²¹ This is the most prestigious kind

of knowledge associated with poets, seers, and prophets in the ancient world.¹²² It is also the kind of knowledge of which the creators of works of art such as the Mari painting and the Assyrian “sacred tree” panel of Ashurnasirpal II’s throne room must have claimed to be in possession. It is the very essence of this knowledge that these two images communicate in highly symbolic terms. Not only are these images timeless in their connectedness across centuries of artistic production in ancient Mesopotamia, but also they depict that timelessness. Works of art of this capacity were produced as much for an imagined future audience as they were for an initiated contemporary audience. Inasmuch as these images are meant for that imagined future, they depict that very future.

Modes of visual thinking were clearly shared among the different cultures of the ancient Near East. Non-Mesopotamian representational traditions centered on the expression of sacral time and apotheosis, such as the Egyptian New Kingdom Books of the Netherworld and Hittite regal art, may have much to offer to an analysis of the Mari painting. Just as it is an exaggeration to think that ancient Egyptian art never changes, it is equally erroneous to think of ancient Mesopotamia as so politically and chronologically fragmented that any observation of instances of continuity in its intellectual perspective and works of art across the ages should be considered anachronistic. Beyond similarities in external and internal circumstances that may have generated similar intellectual environments in Mari and Assyria, the content matter shared by their images also betrays a deep-seated and unbroken continuity in tradition, regardless of the gaps in the visual record.

It may be futile to seek in the textual corpora of Mari and ancient western Asia at large extended written accounts of ideas of future renewal or eschatology to “prove” the interpretive analysis carried out here. I have nevertheless attempted to argue that there is more at stake than we are apt to think, especially upon a consideration of the language of images. While such knowledge may have been put into writing only in a very limited mode on account of its highly restricted nature, the language of images, by virtue of its innate symbolic and cryptic character, may have been deemed much more suitable for the systematic expression of this complexity in the cultures of the ancient Near East.

POSTSCRIPT: WHY THE APOCALYPTIC WOULD HAVE BEEN ESOTERIC

According both to the *Poem of Atra-ḫašis* and the Standard Babylonian version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the knowledge of the Flood was supposed to be kept strictly hidden from humanity.¹²³ It was as a result of the breach of Ea that it got revealed to the Flood Hero in both texts.¹²⁴ The secrecy concerning the knowledge of the Flood could not simply be a matter of hiding the cataclysm from the humanity that it was meant to destroy. In fact, even

long after the Flood had taken place, in the era during which Gilgamesh was king of Uruk, knowledge of it was clearly restricted, since in Tablet 11 of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, when Gilgamesh is speaking with Utnapishtim in his distant home, the latter characterizes the Flood story as a matter that is secret, a mystery of the gods (*pirišti ša ilī*).¹²⁵ Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk, has no knowledge of the Flood until he hears about it from its sole survivor. And what he hears is “top secret.”

One wonders if the secrecy attached to the Flood in ancient Mesopotamia was on account of its containing matters key to the fate and future of the cosmos, a kind of knowledge to which only the divine will would have been privy. One can note that even in the Judeo-Christian tradition, apocalyptic writings were not part of the official canon, with the exception of the Book of Daniel and the Revelation of John,¹²⁶ betraying their esoteric nature. It is rather in Second Temple Judaism that we find the apocalyptic as an important aspect of Jewish thought.¹²⁷ As such, Jewish apocalyptic is “a movement within so-called Late Judaism,” encompassing “the period from the third century B.C. down to New Testament times,” whose writings were not accepted for inclusion in the Old Testament.¹²⁸

If the ancient Mesopotamian consciousness of the future was so much embedded in the past, as Assyriologists have argued, there is no reason not to consider one of the hallmarks of the ancient Mesopotamian sense of the past and primeval history, the Flood, to be of relevance to the idea of the distant future, a concept never readily available in the written sources.¹²⁹ In the visual arts, however, the Mari painting addresses specifically the kind of renewal that revives but also transcends its primeval counterpart. The painting builds on and enhances what the Flood myth contains as a foundation myth, and projects it to a celestial future, placing the royal figure face to face with Ishtar, the goddess of prophecy and celestial fulfillment.¹³⁰ Surely the royal figure shown in the painting is a historical Mari king, whether Zimri-Lim or not. But the hieratic context in which he appears goes beyond signaling the success, auspiciousness, and abundance brought about by his reign.

THE "ROYAL DESTINY": THE "GARDEN SCENE" OF ASHURBANIPAL REVISITED

In *Tammuz*, Moortgat noted the art of the Neo-Assyrian Empire as the semantically most complex within the artistic tradition of ancient Mesopotamia.¹ He observed that in this art the age-old conceptions of immortality were present side by side or blended with what he thought of as fully profane themes, the royal military campaigns. Drawing attention to the difficulty of unpacking this complex interplay, Moortgat highlighted two particular relief compositions in which his timeless or mystical concepts were concentrated, the "sacred tree" slab from the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud (Fig. 3) and the "Garden Scene," or "Garden Party," relief of Ashurbanipal, the last major king of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (Fig. 4).²

In fact, Moortgat singled out Ashurbanipal's relief panel as a work of art that contained all the principal visual themes he traced in the art of ancient Mesopotamia, the garden, the renewal of life, and the defeat of enemies, ending his book with its discussion, as though it were the summation of the entire artistic tradition.³ In a parallel vein, given the integral relevance of its imagery to the themes and notions explored here, an interpretive analysis of Ashurbanipal's "Garden Scene" would be crucial for bringing to completion the present study as well. Like the Mari painting and the throne room "sacred tree" relief of Ashurnasirpal II, this image, too, has so far been looked at primarily from perspectives of political success, vegetal fecundity, and the divine approval of military conquest. Its analysis as well should be opened up to

matters of metaphysical thought explored in the foregoing parts of this study. Thus, in addition to the "immortality belief," I argue that discussions of eschatology and the apocalyptic are equally essential to understanding this dense and important image.

FROM ASHURNASIRPAL TO ASHURBANIPAL

In the art of Ashurnasirpal II at the beginning of the Neo-Assyrian period, there is still a clear distinction between hieratic imagery and historical narrative. Embedded in the "sacred tree" slab of his throne room (Fig. 3) is a sense of primeval history, rather than military or political history. The latter is represented more directly by the battle scenes in the throne room (Figs. 14 and 32). The presence of both modes of "historical" representation in the same space, however, points to the integral relation between the two.⁴ In the "Garden Scene," the two modes, hieratic and historical, interpenetrate in one image, resulting in a highly complex semantic that needs to be disentangled in a step-by-step manner. The "Garden Scene," too, bears a degree of affinity to the "investiture" painting in terms of the thematic parameters we have been exploring. A paradisiac garden, replete with symbolic plants; the king; and a female figure, almost certainly the Assyrian queen, in great likelihood impersonating here the goddess Ishtar through her enthroned stature and the mural crown she wears (Figs. 4 and 51), are all elements that have their counterparts in the Mari painting.⁵ Indeed, the "Garden Scene" is an organic extension into, if not the culmination in, the last phases of the Neo-Assyrian Empire of the timeless concepts that we have been tracing within the artistic continuum of ancient Mesopotamia.

DESCRIPTION AND HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

The "Garden Scene" is a relief slab thought to have fallen from the upper level of Room S in the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh. It was evidently the centerpiece of a larger composition, the main theme of which was the Assyrian victory against the Elamites.⁶ The series is known only partially with the help of drawings by William Boutcher.⁷ Arranged in three registers and covering at least five slabs, it may have decorated a long wall of the room above Room S.⁸ The subject of the centerpiece is the king's celebratory banquet with his consort, apparently associated with the defeat of Elam. The exact historical instance represented and its location are not entirely clear, but the setting is often thought to be the private gardens of Ashurbanipal's queen, Libbali-sharrat, primarily on the basis of the presence of an all-female body of attendants and musicians surrounding the royal couple (Fig. 4).⁹ The scene depicts Ashurbanipal reclining on a couch, holding a lotus blossom in one



51. Detail of Fig. 4, the "Garden Scene," showing the royal couple under the grapevine canopy. Photo: author.



52. Detail of Fig. 4, the "Garden Scene," showing the right hand side of the relief showing fruit-bearing date palm. Photo: author.

hand and a bowl in the other, under a grapevine canopy (Fig. 51). His queen is shown seated on a throne, wearing the mural crown and also holding a bowl and a flower, although the queen's flower is not identical to the king's. The battles against the Elamites are extensively treated in Ashurbanipal's inscriptions, but nowhere in them is any mention of a garden celebration following victory.

The grapevine canopy is part of a garden characterized by alternating coniferous trees and date palms.¹⁰ One of the palms, located to the far right of the viewer, is fruit-bearing (Figs. 4 and 52).¹¹ To the left of the banquet scene, on the neighboring slabs, is a procession of Elamite nobles, identified by means of their distinctive bulbous headdresses and the inscription above them (Fig. 53). The epigraph on this relief indicates that they are serving Ashurbanipal at his banquet.¹² Among them may be Ummanaldash III, the last Elamite king defeated by Ashurbanipal's army, with the nine-year old series of Elamite battles finally complete and Elam definitively subdued.¹³ Ahead of the Elamite princes, additional musicians are shown moving toward the royal couple from the left.¹⁴

To the left of the banquet proper and hanging from a tree is a decapitated head, almost certainly that of Teumman, whom Ashurbanipal defeated at the Battle of Ulai in 653 BCE, the first of the nine-year-long battle sequence



53. Relief panel showing the humiliation of the Elamite captives as they bring food to the royal banquet from Ashurbanipal's North Palace at Nineveh, Neo-Assyrian period. London: British Museum. Photo: author.

(Figs. 4 and 54). There are numerous references in the royal inscriptions of Ashurbanipal to the decapitation of Teumman and his son in battle as well as to the display of the decapitated head of Teumman at the city gates of Nineveh and Arbela during triumphal celebrations.¹⁵ Among them is again no mention of its display in a garden. The receding hairline and the arched nose of the decapitated head, however, have been compared favorably with the relief depictions of the living Teumman showing his defeat and eventual decapitation.¹⁶

Even though there is good reason to assume that the head in the “Garden Scene” is that of Teumman, this matter technically remains a conjecture in the absence of an epigraph on the relief. Pauline Albenda has suggested plausibly that the series featuring the “Garden Scene” may be conflating several chronologically different instances from the chain of battles against the Elamites, starting with the initial defeat of Teumman in 653 BCE, and ending with the triumph over Ummanaldash III.¹⁷ Other possible war trophies in the “Garden Scene” include the sword, bow, and quiver on the table, likely weapons also of Teumman (Figs. 4 and 52).¹⁸ Hanging from the king's couch is an Egyptian-style necklace, perhaps symbolizing the Assyrian conquest of Egypt's twenty-fifth dynasty (747–656 BCE) (Figs. 51–52).¹⁹ Not far from the head of Teumman is a locust on the upper branch of a date palm. In Albenda's words, “a bird sweeps down toward the insect as if to devour it” (Fig. 54).²⁰

In the absence of epigraphic carvings on the relief, also conjectural is the identity of the enthroned woman in the “Garden Scene.” The image of the Assyrian queen in the visual record has been established on the basis of sparse



54. Detail of Fig. 4, the "Garden Scene," showing the decapitated head hanging from a tree. Photo: author.

evidence, the two other primary pieces being the fragmentary stela from Assur showing a figure wearing the mural crown, also identified as Libbali-sharrat based on an inscription associated with the slab; and the bronze plaque depicting Esarhaddon accompanied in great likelihood by his mother Naqi'a (Zakutu), the queen of Sennacherib.²¹ As a result, alternative identifications of the enthroned woman in the "Garden Scene" have been put forward in the scholarship. One such view is Constanze Schmidt-Colinet's argument that the figure with the mural crown is not the Assyrian queen, and not even a woman at all, but the viceroy of Babylonia, a highly sacerdotal eunuch official, complementing here the king within the ideological, almost utopian, Assyro-Babylonian unity of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.²² Another is Margaret Cool Root's reading of the figure as a noble woman of Elamite origin, taken to Assyria as part of the war spoils and made a royal consort, and similarly standing for the successful and fecund incorporation of the wealth of Elam into the Assyrian imperium. Root revives an older interpretation of the figure along these lines by Ernst Herzfeld, and presents her argument against the backdrop of the rich allusions to Elam and the Elamite battles in the relief program of Ashurbanipal.²³

Both views are highly sophisticated but quite idiosyncratic. For the purposes of this study, I do not question the identity of the enthroned woman as the Assyrian queen, whatever her name or ethnic origins may be. Libbali-sharrat is Ashurbanipal's official queen, the *Ml.É.GAL*, a term referring to the chief wife of the Assyrian king, on record; and enough of her name, "Libbali-ša[rrat]," has survived on the fragment associated with the Assur stela to make the

identification of her image on the slab plausible.²⁴ Thus, my own interpretation of the symbolism of the enthroned woman is based on her simple identification as the official Assyrian queen of Ashurbanipal at the time of the carving of the relief, whether she is indeed Libbali-sharrat or another unknown woman appearing in this very rubric. In the end, this figure may be more allegorical than historical, and her personal and ethnic identity may be secondary to the concepts she arguably stands for, as presented further below.

PREVIOUS INTERPRETATIONS AND THE PRESENT APPROACH

The “Garden Scene” is widely perceived as a visual expression of the might of Assyria and Ashurbanipal conveyed especially through the war trophies displayed within its landscape. In a detailed 1976–77 analysis of the composition, Albenda concluded that the relief is about the peaceful environment enjoyed by the banqueting couple attained only after intensive and prolonged military effort, as revealed by the trophy objects in the garden, which she associated with the Elamite, Egyptian, and Babylonian victories of the reign of Ashurbanipal.²⁵ Root’s 2013 interpretation of the relief, too, is by and large a politicized reading of the scene, foregrounding the incorporation of Elam, with key aspects of its landscape and culture, into the Assyrian domain.²⁶ Without rejecting the many possible references in the relief to the military and political affairs of the time of Ashurbanipal and their cultural and ideological implications, I should like to argue here that there is much more to the meaning of the composition than the imperial prosperity of Assyria, which now encompasses the riches and lusciousness of Elam, and the Assyrian king’s enjoyment of a garden of delights achieved only after much strife.

Another way in which to understand the lack of clearly articulated chronological referents in the relief may be that the image partakes of a degree of timelessness, albeit with elements in it evocative of contemporary incidents, known from records, spread over the reign of Ashurbanipal. In an era of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in which many key relief slabs were inscribed and identified by epigraphs, it is not unlikely that such a powerful image was deliberately left un-inscribed in order to strengthen its probable avoidance of being fixed in a specific time and place. If there is such an element of timelessness in the scene, then in its study we should adopt angles that take that timelessness into consideration.

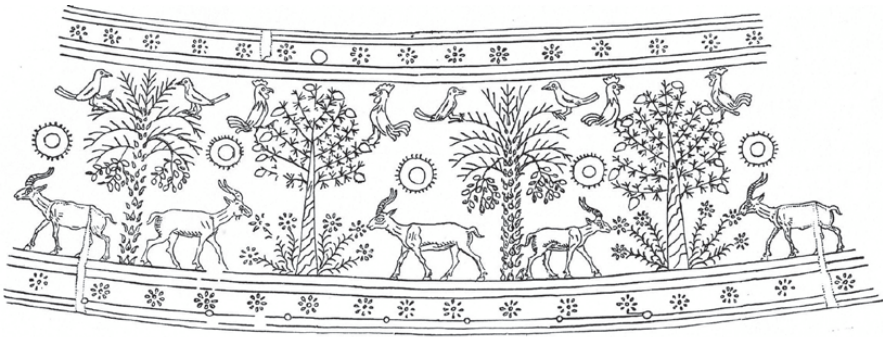
I would like to propose that the intrinsic meaning of the scene is a puzzle, an enigma. To that end, I should like to point out alternative tracks in probing the critical parameters of this scene, the elements of vegetation, the trophies, including the decapitated head, and ultimately the figure of the Assyrian queen wearing the mural crown. Rather than a celebratory expression of the divinely sanctioned royal and imperial might of Assyria, its definitive defeat and

incorporation of Elam and possibly Egypt, and the ensuing luxury and peace,²⁷ I propose that the scene poses for contemplation both royal power and idyllic peace as problematic concepts. Such problematization may be an aspect of a possible speculation on royal destiny, a concept that I introduced at the beginning of this study. One could consider under this designation examples, both mythical and historical, of royal figures with a distinctive fate beyond death, such as the tenure of Gilgamesh as lord over the dead in the netherworld, the immortalization of the Babylonian Flood Hero and his placement in a terrestrial paradise, and the references to the ascent to heaven of Shulgi and Ishbi-Erra, all discussed in the previous chapters. With its probable location in a private apartment of the palace, the "Garden Scene" may have constituted for its original audience a medium of meditation on the nature of kingship and empire on the one hand, and on human and cosmic destiny at a more fundamental level on the other.

PARADISIAC IMPLICATIONS

In an attempt to understand aspects of Assyrian garden scenes, Paul Collins has suggested that the alternation of the conifer with the fruit-bearing date palm in a number of such representations is a trope of gender duality, and hence a symbol of abundance. An example is the Middle Assyrian ivory pyxis found in Ashur Tomb 45 (Fig. 55).²⁸ In the scene on the pyxis, pairs of wild roosters are shown perched on the branches of the conifers, while what look like hens perch on the fruit-bearing date palms. Since the male and female flowers of the date palm are on separate trees, the fruit-bearing date palm must indicate a fertilized tree. As Collins suggests, a relationship is established on the pyxis between the conifer and masculinity just as between the date palm and femininity. We see the same alternation in depictions of idyllic landscapes on other reliefs of Ashurbanipal, such as the backdrop for a scene of a lion and lioness on a panel from Room E of the North Palace at Nineveh (Fig. 56).²⁹ This scene seems to be part of a larger composition that includes a procession of female musicians and beardless men holding mastiffs (Fig. 57).³⁰ In both representations, branches of grapevine are also shown entwined around the trunks of the conifers.³¹

In addition to possible gender symbolism, the conifer and the date palm may be thought to stand for Assyria and Babylonia, respectively, as the hallmarks of the native flora of these two geographic regions of Mesopotamia.³² The presence of the fruit-bearing date palm in Assyrian reliefs should not mean that the setting of the relevant scenes is always outside Assyria, such as Babylonia or Elam, where the date palm would bear fruit on account of the favorable climatic conditions absent in the Assyrian North. Rather than realistic views, these representations may be showing ideal landscapes. Assyrian



55. Drawing of the design on the ivory pyxis found in Assur Tomb 45, Middle Assyrian period. From Haller, *Die Gräber und Gräfte von Assur*, Abb. 161. Courtesy Der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft.



56. Relief panel showing lions relaxing in a garden from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh, Neo-Assyrian period. London: British Museum. ©Trustees of the British Museum.



57. Procession of musicians with lions in a garden from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh, Neo-Assyrian period. London: British Museum. Photo: author.

kings are known from their inscriptions to have created botanical and zoological gardens in which the flora and fauna of lands outside Assyria were also incorporated.³³ There exists in these inscriptions the hyperbole that these outlandish plants flourished more prosperously in the Assyrian royal gardens than they did in their native lands. Among the plants that the Assyrian kings list in their inscriptions as part of the flora of their gardens, the trees of Babylonia, those of the mountains, and the vine occur quite frequently.³⁴

The ideological significance of the Assyrian royal gardens certainly went beyond showcasing imperial power over lands reached or incorporated by the Assyrian administration. It also entailed the creation of a symbolic environment meant to evoke lands beyond the ordinary senses. With a prototype likely in the Syrian tradition,³⁵ the Assyrian garden also has a cousin in the Achaemenid Persian pleasure garden called a *pairadæza*, from which is derived the English word paradise.³⁶ As such, we again encounter the paradisiac paradigm that we have addressed in the previous chapters, exemplified best in ancient Mesopotamia by the land of immortality found in the Flood stories. In addition to stylized representations of the pleasure gardens created by the Assyrian kings, the visual depictions of ideal landscapes in Assyrian art would also be evocative of such mythical locales. In this regard, the garden in which Ashurbanipal and his queen are stationed have connotations of a supernatural realm (Figs. 4 and 51).³⁷ Or rather, it is only Ashurbanipal, whose figure is on the background, set directly against the vegetation, who has been situated here, and the foregrounded and enthroned female figure is of an entirely different order and reality, as I argue further below. In the case of the "Garden Scene" as well, the symbolism of gender and abundance behind the alternation between the conifer and the date palm, as well as the erotic overtones of the royal couple, must have implications beyond sexual and agrarian fertility, referring to new or renewed generation in a spiritual domain. Such symbolism would also be meaningful in a funerary context such as represented by the Middle Assyrian ivory pyxis (Fig. 55).

THE "GARDEN SCENE" AND ITS INTERCULTURAL CONNECTIONS

In addition to the alternating pine and palm trees, we see in the "Garden Scene" the prominence of the grapevine (Figs. 4 and 51), which, before the seventh century BCE, does not occur in the extant examples of Assyrian art.³⁸ Its persistent inclusion in the idyllic landscape scenes of the North Palace at Nineveh leads one to consider that it has symbolic significance (Figs. 56–57). In a study on the grapevines in representations of the gardens of Ashurbanipal, Albenda concluded that the vine had religious meaning, without discussing specifics or details.³⁹ The most direct connection between the grapevine canopy and the banqueting couple may be in the toast itself, especially if the

shallow drinking bowls held in their hands contained wine (Fig. 51).⁴⁰ Along with the date palm, the olive, and the fig, the vine is one of the quintessentially symbolic plants of greater Mediterranean and Near Eastern geography, all of which had connotations not only of fertility but also possibly of regeneration and paradise.⁴¹ At a symbolic level, partaking of wine and possessing a magical flower held in the hand may be considered as life-giving activities, life again understood in its sense of eternal life or immortality.

In his short 1951 monograph on the king and the tree of life in the ancient Near East, Widengren identified the plant held by the seated or banqueting king as a branch or twig from the tree of life and the cup held by him as a vessel containing the water of life.⁴² He posited that a scene type essentially of Syro-Mesopotamian origin, the seated or banqueting king, eventually acquired an ancient Egyptian motif, the lotus, through Egyptian influence on the artistic traditions of the Levant. Widengren gave a number of examples from the Syro-Hittite and Phoenician realms of the Iron Age showing seated figures holding lotus flowers and cups in front of banquet tables.⁴³ The seated king holding a lotus is attested in earlier Neo-Assyrian art as well, encountered on the reliefs of Tiglath-Pileser III. The scene type is seen as one of the hallmarks of the artistic influence of Syria on the Neo-Assyrian Empire.⁴⁴

A relatively recent find, a stela from the Syro-Hittite site of Sam'al (Zincirli), from the eighth century BCE, unequivocally reveals the connection between the banquet and the beyond in the Syro-Anatolian world in the Iron Age. The Aramaic inscription on the stela specifies offerings for the "soul" of the deceased "that (will be) in the stela."⁴⁵ The deceased himself, one KTMW, is shown seated holding a shallow bowl and what looks like a pine cone in front of a banquet table. Even though the offerings listed in the inscription are not those placed on the banquet table,⁴⁶ the funerary implications of the banquet scene are nevertheless clear in this context. In light of the association between the banquet scene and the beyond in the Syro-Hittite art of the Iron Age, Ashurbanipal's "Garden Scene," too, must be infused with otherworldly notions.⁴⁷ Widengren aptly recognized the scene of the banqueting king as showing a meal consumed in the beyond, and the meal itself as one that imparts immortality.⁴⁸ Even though Widengren concentrated on water as a life-giving drink in association with the cup held by the royal banqueter, it is more likely that the drinking bowls held by Ashurbanipal and his queen in the "Garden Scene" contain wine rather than water (Fig. 51).⁴⁹

The seated or standing king holding the shallow bowl ceremonially appears many times throughout the state apartments of the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II.⁵⁰ In these instances as well, the bowl is likely for wine. Because the king always holds the bowl at a distance from himself, it is often unclear in these scenes whether he is about to drink or libate from the vessels. By contrast, in Ashurbanipal's reliefs from the North Palace at Nineveh,

depictions of libation and drinking are clearly distinguished. There is no question, for instance, that the "Garden Scene" depicts the act of drinking (Fig. 51). Another relief shows Ashurbanipal libating over dead lions in the aftermath of a royal hunt. The liquid poured is rendered in the form of streams; it is certainly wine, an offering worthy of leonine symbolism, as corroborated by the relevant hunting epigraph.⁵¹

One of the finest relief compositions from the Northwest Palace at Nimrud shows Ashurnasirpal II seated, as if at a banquet, although perhaps actually in audience, holding the bowl at some distance from himself in the usual formulaic manner characterizing all the scenes from the palace showing the king with the bowl.⁵² In hindsight, we should identify this audience scene as one of ceremonial drinking as well because of its resemblance to Ashurbanipal's "Garden Scene."⁵³ Wine was no doubt a symbolic drink in the ancient Near East and Egypt. In Egypt it was connected with regeneration and immortality, the domain of the god of the terrestrial beyond, Osiris.⁵⁴ In an Indic framework, Coomaraswamy, too, points out how wine is one of the earthly substitutes for the life-giving *soma*, an essentially divine or heavenly drink that imparts immortality.⁵⁵ Regardless of whether it is the water of life or the immortal wine held by the bowl, and whether it is the lotus or another plant held in the hand, banquet scenes from the Syro-Hittite and Assyrian cultures should be understood to resonate with conceptions of the beyond, regeneration, and the attainment of immortality. Ashurbanipal's "Garden Scene" perhaps crowns this Syro-Mesopotamian visual tradition in the last great artistic phase of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

While the grapevine is absent from Assyrian art before the time of Sennacherib, its occurrence is attested earlier in ancient Egyptian funerary art, quite remarkably on the ceiling of the burial chamber of the eighteenth-dynasty official Sennufer.⁵⁶ An elaborate grape vine composition covers the entire painted ceiling. One of the scenes shows the deceased and his wife seated in front of a table of offerings; another depicts them standing being purified by a *sem*-priest (Fig. 58). Here, the grape vine clearly symbolizes rebirth in the beyond, commensurate with ancient Egyptian notions of the afterlife. Given also the presence of an Egyptian token, the necklace, in the "Garden Scene" (Figs. 51–52), as well as the presence of Egyptians at the Assyrian court around this time, an affinity in Neo-Assyrian art with the Egyptian interest in depicting the grapevine may well be the case.⁵⁷

Assyrian familiarity with ancient Egyptian methods of securing a box is attested by the technical details of the sarcophagus lids found in the royal burials of Nimrud.⁵⁸ Among the artifacts of the Queens' Tombs at Nimrud is a gold crown found on a child's skull in the antechamber of Tomb III:⁵⁹ "Sized to fit an adult . . . this elaborate headdress incorporates tiers of pomegranates, flowers, winged female figures, and leafy vines from which tiny grape clusters dangle."⁶⁰



58. Wall painting from the tomb of Sennufer, a Theban official, showing a grapevine spanning the ceiling, Dynasty 18, New Kingdom. Photo Credit: James Morris / Art Resource, NY.

Although of uncertain date, this object confirms the Assyrian interest in the grapevine as a symbolic vegetal motif, possibly with regenerative associations to have found its way into, if not produced specifically for, a burial.⁶¹ Finally, as Albenda mentions, grape clusters with vine leaves also appear among symbols of agrarian fertility on the eighth-century BCE Neo-Hittite rock relief at İvriz in the Taurus mountains in southern central Anatolia, held in the hand of the storm god along with sheaves of wheat and what may be streams of water (Fig. 59).⁶² If we look at the “Garden Scene” from this wider intercultural perspective of vegetal symbolism, regeneration, and paradise, the war trophies in the composition call for closer scrutiny (Figs. 51–52 and 54).

“THE CHARMS OF TYRANNY”

If the “Garden Scene” indeed depicts such an idyllic and paradisiac environment, the significance of the war trophies, including the decapitated head of Teumman, need to be seen as problematic and explained in ways that go beyond matters of imperial prowess and military success. In order to address some of these complexities, I should like to appeal to a scholarly discussion on the ambivalent nature of rule, power, wealth, and luxuriance in Archaic and Classical Greek poetry and prose, especially the works of Pindar, Bacchylides, and Herodotus, from the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. This discussion has the potential to contribute to a theoretical working model for an alternative



59. The Ivriz rock relief showing the storm god holding sheaves of wheat and streams of water facing the royal figure, Neo-Hittite period. Photo: author.

analysis of Ashurbanipal's "Garden Scene," since both the Assyrian image and the Greek literary accounts share certain crucial topoi in the depiction of the ancient Near Eastern monarch. The matter is explored masterfully by Gregory Nagy in his *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past*, in a chapter titled "The Charms of Tyranny."⁶³ Indeed, the "Garden Scene" has been seen by some as the prototype of symposium scenes in ancient Greek art.⁶⁴ Such a similarity may well be superficial, but it is clearly the case that the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, during which Assyrian power was at its peak, represent the most dynamic period in which ideas from the Near East were infiltrating ancient Greek civilization.⁶⁵ As such, it is well worth probing conceptual affinities between the cultures of Assyria and Greece in the perception of power, wealth, and luxuriance among their intellectuals, the artists and the poets.

While the relevant Greek material is literary, the Assyrian material is visual. And yet, both share the common denominator of what Nagy refers to as *ainos*, authoritative speech, a mode of communication meant to instruct and warn, and possessed by one who is wise and privy to special knowledge.⁶⁶ In ancient Mesopotamian myth, such wisdom originated from the *apkallus*, antediluvian sages, whose depictions appear in the earliest phase of the Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs at the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, including

the "sacred tree" panel from the throne room (Figs. 3 and 33).⁶⁷ Even though the Greek concept of *ainos* is essentially a literary one, I see value in translating it to the Assyrian visual domain, especially in light of my conviction that the Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs contained special knowledge accessible only to an initiated internal audience.⁶⁸

The luxuriance-loving "oriental despot" as a paragon of *hubris* is a well-known ancient Greek cliché, but the sources themselves seem to present a much more complex picture. There are also positive sides to the traditional concept of the "tyrant." The equal emphasis on the negative and positive sides in the portrayal of the Lydian monarch Croesus in Herodotus is a case in point; it is paralleled by tropes found in the epinician poetry of Pindar and Bacchylides.⁶⁹ An epinician song is a song of praise commissioned by a patron from a poet on the occasion of an accomplishment, usually a successful athletic contest in the case of Pindar.⁷⁰ The Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs as well as Assyrian royal inscriptions can also be thought of as media of praise, among other things, in the service of the monarch, commissioned by the royal patron from the master artist and the historiographer, and created primarily on the occasion of military achievements. The inscriptions were perhaps meant to be read aloud.⁷¹

In dissecting the complexity of the Greek portrayal of the tyrant or the oriental despot, Nagy points out how the concept of wealth, *olbos*, has a transcendent capacity, in addition to referring to material or worldly riches.⁷² For instance, both the initiates of the Eleusinian mysteries and the immortalized heroes of the Theban and Trojan cycles are referred to in texts as *olbioi*, the wealthy or the fortunate ones.⁷³ In Herodotus' and Bacchylides' accounts of the Lydian ruler Croesus, when the monarch is about to be incinerated by the flames at the hands of his captor Cyrus, he invokes Apollo, reminding him of his offerings at Delphi, followed by his rescue from the funeral pyre.⁷⁴ An important additional theme can be found in Bacchylides, in which Apollo transports Croesus to the Land of the Hyperboreans, a mythical land, which Nagy understands as a translation of the *olbos* from the wealth of this life to the bliss of a timeless existence beyond death.⁷⁵ Rather than a palatial garden in the literal sense of the word, the ideal environment to which Ashurbanipal and his queen seem to have acquired access in the "Garden Scene" as well may have resonances of such a supernatural realm, with a number of indicators for an idealized bliss for Ashurbanipal, the date palm, the grapevine, possible wine-drinking, and the company of a woman.

The Lydian analogy I propose here also has a historical background, in that the Lydian king Gyges is mentioned in Ashurbanipal's inscriptions as having sent diplomatic emissaries to the Assyrian king.⁷⁶ Lydia, as well as Phrygia before it, were regions open to influences both from Greece and the Near East in the Iron Age.⁷⁷ Through an Anatolian conduit, a genuine

understanding and appreciation of the conceptions, metaphysics, and problems of ancient Near Eastern royalty may well have informed ancient Greek intellectuals such as Herodotus and Bacchylides in their treatment of the story of the Lydian king Croesus. Especially Herodotus' conceptual connectedness to a larger network of ancient Near Eastern lore is increasingly being noted in recent scholarship.⁷⁸

In the ancient Greek epinician song, while the praise stresses the positive aspects, the accomplishments, of the tyrant, a negative sense is often signaled, especially if there exists the danger that prosperity and luxuriance should turn to excess and lead to true tyranny.⁷⁹ In Pindar's words, "the prosperity [*olbos*] of humans does not go ahead safe and sound, for a very long time, when it gets attracted to them, with its full weight."⁸⁰ In this respect, in Nagy's words, the song of praise is ambivalent; while it "makes the pleasurable material security of the tyrant into a transcendent thing," sometimes "in a language that clearly espouses sensuality," it also conveys the "latent negative" aspects of such a security, since luxuriance in excess has "built-in dangers."⁸¹ I propose an analogous semantic ambivalence for the "Garden Scene," with the overt praise of the patron expressed by the sensuous comfort that Ashurbanipal and his queen appear to enjoy, a unique Assyrian depiction of a royal couple and a couch,⁸² and the latent negative tone signaled by the incorporation of the decapitated head into the landscape.

The Assyrians, unlike the Greeks, were a monarchy and an empire. They were not necessarily against tyranny, understood in its ordinary sense, which they often practiced against their enemies. The defeat and decapitation of Teumman at the Battle of Ulai are prominently depicted on an elaborate relief series decorating one of the rooms of Sennacherib's Southwest Palace at Nineveh, where Ashurbanipal also lived during the early years of his reign.⁸³ We know from the inscriptions of Ashurbanipal how hated the Elamite king Teumman was, and how much of a revelry the display of his decapitated head at Arbela and Nineveh had generated.⁸⁴ And yet, there are two things that we should also keep in mind. The first is that what was part of the practical and political reality may not always have coincided fully with what was on the minds of the intellectuals and master artists in their renditions of these events. The second is that the material and physical security of the king was far from immune to danger and deterioration in Assyrian perceptions of royalty either. The death of Sargon II on the battlefield, compounded with the failure to retrieve his body for proper burial, the murder of Sennacherib in an intrigue for succession, and the preoccupation of Esarhaddon with omens all show how troubled the Sargonid dynasty was in general.⁸⁵ The somber tone of the text known as the *Sin of Sargon* and the emphasis on ritual practices to avert evil from the king in this period also show to what extent royalty was perceived as something truly endangered.⁸⁶

One can even extend this fragility to the imperial level. The time of Ashurbanipal was on the one hand the most prosperous, mighty, and artistically refined phase of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, during which wealth and luxury poured into the imperial center from all the conquered hinterland. On the other hand, it was also the time when the empire had already overextended its limits, with the danger of collapse imminent.⁸⁷ With its probable location in the private chambers of the North Palace, the "Garden Scene" may well have been a source of meditation on kingship and empire from this point of view, if not some kind of *memento mori*. As a work of art, it would have fulfilled such a function much more effectively than another possible medium, such as literature, preserving in it special knowledge that would have been communicated uniquely through images. Thus, at some level, the "Garden Scene" may have offered its beholder the potential to appreciate and praise the sensuality and wealth inherent in royalty and victory and to warn implicitly against its pitfalls and excesses. In this respect, one might think that the king would have beheld an image that was not flattering at all times. However, the philosophical content and learnedness of this depiction may have been such that, it would have been welcome and efficacious within equally learned parameters of royal consent and appreciation.

Why the medium of expression of the warning or the latent negativity in royal prowess and luxuriance should be the displayed remains of a defeated royal enemy is another question to address. There is often a complexity to the defeat of an opponent and its consequences for the victor in ancient Mesopotamian myth. We can remember, for instance, how in their expedition to the Cedar Forest, an enchanted land, Gilgamesh and Enkidu, despite all warnings from the elders of Uruk, face the guardian of the cedars, Humbaba, in a battle, and kill him in Tablet 5 of the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh*. The consequences of the killing of Humbaba, which is followed by that of the Bull of Heaven in Tablet 6, constitute the reason why one of the two heroes, Enkidu, has to die.⁸⁸ Despite all his animosity to the heroes, Humbaba is no ordinary enemy, and his killing is a complicated affair with clear negative consequences for his slayers.⁸⁹ In the Babylonian poem of cosmogony, the members of the army of Tiamat, although not fully annihilated, are rendered impotent by Marduk, but almost commemorated through their representations set up at the doors of the Apsû.⁹⁰ Their numinous presence continues inside the palaces of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal at Nineveh in the form of doorway figures.

The incorporation into an otherwise idyllic and peaceful landscape of the defeated and dismembered royal Teumman could not have been a neutral affair either (Fig. 54). It may be plausible to see the decapitated head of the Elamite king as a trope that signals the hubristic component latent in royal power, a notion clearly present in the Sargonid historical royal lore in Assyria, as we have seen. It is in this regard that the scholarly discussion on the complexities of royal or "tyrannical" power in ancient Greek literature can contribute to a

working model in approaching these cruxes, not that this is a simple matter of trying to explain Assyrian art through Greek concepts. In such a reading, the ambivalence presented by the scene would hence be between "transcendence," conveyed by the idyllic landscape, and "transience,"⁹¹ conveyed by the death and decay of a body part that once was a king's, rendered in an extreme form of ethnic alterity.⁹² Transience is perhaps further accentuated in the scene by the naturalistic detail of the bird sweeping as if to swallow the locust, which Albenda again interprets as symbolizing Assyria's defeat of Elam.⁹³ The tension between the transcendent and transient embedded in this paradisiac garden is set in juxtaposition with the permanence connoted by an ideal civic form, the mural crown worn by the Assyrian queen.

THE ASSYRIAN QUEEN WEARING THE MURAL CROWN

As far as conceptions of transcendence embedded in the "Garden Scene" are concerned, we should take one final step, and see the enthroned queen wearing the mural crown as the ultimate level of transcendence expressed in the relief (Fig. 51). This level of transcendence goes beyond the ideal landscape and its inherent problems, signaled especially by the decapitated head (Fig. 54). The composition gives us the impression that this is an intimate scene showing an amorous companionship between the reclining royal figure and the seated queen. However, a careful look reveals elements that dissociate the queen from the reclining king and subtly make this majestic Assyrian woman the *non plus ultra* of the message of the relief.

Firstly, she is regally enthroned, a position in which we otherwise find only the reigning monarch (Figs. 4 and 51).⁹⁴ Secondly, she is spatially the foremost figure of the carving, leaving both the king and the garden in the background. Thirdly, even though the mural crown is found exclusively in association with representations of queens in the Neo-Assyrian visual record, it may be thought of as a full-fledged royal signifier.⁹⁵ Indeed, Ishtar is referred to as "king" (*lugal*) in a prophetic text addressed to Ashurbanipal, as well as possibly in the Nineveh *Ishtar Temple Inscription*, if the royal attribute in the designation "the wife of the high Enlil, over the gods, the king of heaven and earth, the fixer of destinies, the mother of the gods" refers to the goddess rather than to Enlil.⁹⁶ Despite all the explicitly royal attributes possessed by the figure of the queen, the artists who carved the "Garden Scene" must have observed some sense of decorum, nevertheless, by ensuring that the king would be the tallest figure in the composition, even though he is shown reclining. But the upright posture and verticality of the enthroned queen sets a contrast with the horizontality of the reclining position of the king.⁹⁷ The king here is more directly connected with the paradisiac landscape and its "problems," whereas the figure of the queen seems to be free of either.

In the relief, the queen's mural crown is perhaps the strongest pointer to her deputizing for the goddess Ishtar in the *akitu* festival, the New Year's celebrations, known to have taken place in the cities of Nineveh and Arbela, both sacred to the goddess, in each of which she appears in a distinct manifestation, Ishtar of Nineveh and Ishtar of Arbela.⁹⁸ In Ashurbanipal's inscriptions, the *akitu* is mentioned in relation to celebrations of triumph over the Elamites, especially the defeat of Teumman.⁹⁹ The merging of the idea of the city, Ishtar as a civic goddess, and the queen is perhaps apparent in the name of Libbali-sharrat, which means "The Inner City [i.e. Ištar?] is queen."¹⁰⁰ Thus, it is sensible to see the queen here as more than the queen herself, but as the personification of the city of Nineveh, the ideal or "eternal" imperial city sacred to Ishtar, one of the national deities of Assyria.¹⁰¹ In the few extant representations of royal women in Neo-Assyrian art, the depictions feature a highly formulaic official or state image of the Assyrian queen, with due symbolism attached to this portrayal, perhaps that of imperial prosperity, again not as an end in itself, but with all its philosophical implications.¹⁰²

The idea of the city inherent in the mural crown may be thought to partake of the larger semantics of the theme of the city and city walls with their towers and crenellated battlements found in the visual repertoire of ancient Mesopotamia. The city as theme is prominent in Assyrian scenes of imperial siege and conquest, usually revolving around images of fortified cities, such as Lachish.¹⁰³ This type of scene has its ancestry in the Ramesside historical relief of the Egyptian New Kingdom, the battle reliefs of Sety I and Ramesses II (Dynasty 19, 1279–1213 BCE).¹⁰⁴ Also relevant are scenes of foreign tribute or submission to the Assyrian king from the palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad, showing delegates from the North Syrian states presenting tokens or models of the walled city, again with crenellated battlements, to the king.¹⁰⁵

The walled city also appears in more immediately sacral contexts in the art of ancient Mesopotamia, such as depictions on Middle Babylonian (Kassite) commemorative monuments, the so-called *kudurrus*, of city walls with crenellated battlements surrounding the entire stela, containing divine symbols, some of which are astral (Fig. 60).¹⁰⁶ In fact, the netherworld, the chief formulation of the beyond in ancient Mesopotamian religion, is sometimes referred to as the great city, Sumerian *urugal*, in the written sources.¹⁰⁷ Given that the city may have been considered as a model of the cosmos in ancient Mesopotamian visual thinking and intellectual perspective, both the conquest or submission of a foreign city and the Assyrian imperial cities themselves must be seen as loaded with notions of cosmic totality.¹⁰⁸

The sacral symbolism attached to crenellated battlements and their representation in the visual arts was pointed out in a 1967 article by Edith Porada titled "Battlements in the Military Architecture and in the Symbolism of the Ancient Near East."¹⁰⁹ In this study, beyond pointing to the presence of



60. *Kudurru* featuring a city wall containing astral symbols, Middle Babylonian period. London: British Museum. Photo: author.

such a symbolism, however, Porada did not engage with the semantic potential of the city and crenellated battlements as represented in the visual arts.¹¹⁰ There is, nevertheless, enough evidence, both textual and visual, from ancient Mesopotamia, testifying to a cosmological understanding of the city encompassing both the netherworld and the celestial sphere as formulations of the beyond, as well as notions of totality. The mural crown worn by the female royal figure in the "Garden Scene" should also be understood within this context.

THE CELESTIAL CITY

It is perhaps no wonder, then, that about three centuries after Ashurbanipal, the Seleucids who established the successor empire of Alexander the Great in Syria and Mesopotamia, depicted the Greek goddess Tyche, Fortune, with the mural crown, creating the figural type known as the Tyche of Antioch. In classical antiquity, Tyche, Roman Fortuna, was a goddess presiding over the destinies of individual mortals and all humanity alike.¹¹¹ Tyche of Antioch was given its definitive sculptural interpretation in the early third century BCE by the Hellenistic artist Eutychides, who drew on previous representations of Asiatic goddesses in Hellenistic coinage.¹¹² Because Antioch, being a new city, did not claim a god or a founding hero, Tyche became a convenient emblem.¹¹³ The image had a widespread dissemination especially on coinage in the Hellenistic and Roman East.

In the relevant scholarly literature, there is no satisfactory explanation for the connection between the concept of "fortune" and the city in the semantics of the figural type of the Tyche of Antioch. Tyche is often seen as a personification and protectress of the city she represents. In Antioch, too, she was merged with the city itself.¹¹⁴ A related view is also that the idea of a deified city found expression in the figure of a goddess wearing the mural crown,

taking its reference from the city walls, the most representative component of a city.¹¹⁵ In an article on mural crowns in the ancient Near East and Greece, however, Dietz Metzler aptly stresses that the symbolism of the mural crown, especially by virtue of its round form evoking matters of cyclicity, must go beyond strength, safety, and prosperity, and should rather be connected with conceptions of cosmic totality and eternity.¹¹⁶

After examining Ashurbanipal's banquet scene, one wonders if what is embedded in the figure of the Assyrian queen wearing the mural crown is already the idea of fortune, more specifically a conception of royal fortune, or royal destiny, the way I have formulated it, and a favorable one at that, one of apotheosis and transcendence. As such, this female *royal* figure stands for the imperial city of Nineveh, its patron goddess Ishtar, and the ultimate transcendence this goddess offers and represents beyond her basic association with war and sexuality.¹¹⁷ From this standpoint, the later merging of the goddess Tyche, Roman Fortuna, with the mural crown could not have been incidental, but based on a genuine understanding of the meaning of the crown in its ancient Near Eastern, more specifically Neo-Assyrian, context, that of royal fortune.¹¹⁸ There certainly was continuity in cuneiform practices from the native ancient Mesopotamian traditions to the Seleucid court of the Hellenistic period, as exemplified by the work of Berossos, a Babylonian priest who wrote a hieratic history of Babylonia in Greek under Seleucid patronage. Such continuity would have left open a variety of channels of communication in the transmission of visual and intellectual elements from ancient Mesopotamia proper to the Hellenistic period. As such, the connection between the idea of the city and that of fortune in the formulation of the image of the Tyche of Antioch is one that likely goes back to Neo-Assyrian and Mesopotamian conceptions of the city and the goddess as supreme manifestations of celestial transcendence. In this respect, in the "Garden Scene" what is ostensibly the representation of a queen is in fact a powerful element of regal art. This figure is a female personification with links to Ishtar, standing for celestial transcendence, set against a terrestrial and paradisiac background, to which it is superior.

The numinous way in which the city of Nineveh was perceived in the Assyrian court can be seen in the inscriptions of Sennacherib, grandfather of Ashurbanipal and founder of the ancient city of Nineveh as the last imperial Assyrian capital:

Nineveh, the exalted cult center, the city loved by the goddess Ištar ... in which all the rituals for gods and goddesses are present; the enduring foundation (and) eternal base whose plan had been designed by the stars (lit. 'writing') of the firmament and whose arrangement was made manifest since time immemorial ... a sophisticated place (and) site of secret lore in which every kind of skilled craftsmanship, all of the rituals, (and) the secret(s) of the *lalgār* (cosmic subterranean water) are apprehended.¹¹⁹

Likewise, Arbela, sacred to the goddess Ishtar and the center of prophecy in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, is referred to as "heaven without equal" (*šame ša lā šanāni*) in contemporary hymns.¹²⁰ The integration of a symbolic city, in great likelihood a metaphor for the imperial capital, with the figure of the Assyrian queen, likely a metaphor for Ishtar as the goddess of the Assyrian imperium, patron deity of Nineveh as a celestial foundation, and the goddess of prophecy in a fundamental sense, results in a highly potent official regal image with implications beyond the representation of a specific individual.¹²¹ The appearance in the visual record of the Assyrian queen from the time of Sennacherib on may well parallel an increase in the social status of women at the royal court.¹²² But the hieratic implications of her formulaic image in the expression of notions of transcendence and royal destiny must have held higher priority for the Assyrian iconographer in its conceptualization than a desire to engage with the role of women in palatial life in the artistic programs of the Sargonid kings.

THE GARDEN AS A TRANSITIONAL EXTREME

Once we have established the ritual and symbolic nature of Ashurbanipal's "Garden Scene," we can observe here as well the idea that the paradisiac, as represented by the ideal garden in the scene, is not the ultimate stage of transcendence in matters of the beyond embedded in the scene. The garden is certainly an aspect of the beyond, but it is more appropriately the background to an ultimate stage of transcendence expressed in this composition through the figure of the enthroned Assyrian queen, impersonating simultaneously the city of Nineveh and the goddess Ishtar, possibly in her crucial role in the rite of renewal, the *akitu* (Figs. 4 and 51). Thus, the garden is again a terrestrial extreme bordering on the heavenly within a system of gradation whose ultimate point is the celestial sphere. Visual expressions of the latter state in the art of ancient Mesopotamia are encounter scenes between king and divinity in which the king is offered the ring and rod, as seen in the "investiture" painting and the Assyrian "sacred tree" relief from the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II (Figs. 2–3, 5, and 7). Both images present this ultimate state of transcendence on the foundation of a vegetal and aquatic phenomenon, the garden, the flowing vase, the tree.

Within the ostensibly realistic idiom of the later phases of Neo-Assyrian art, however, Ashurbanipal's artists likely opted for a novel manner in which to convey the relevant concepts by embedding them in the depiction of a victory celebration in praise of the king and empire. The introduction of a greater degree of complexity into the expression of age-old notions of immortality and eternity in Ashurbanipal's art may be seen as commensurate with the proliferation of learning and scholarship, such as omens, dreams, and prophecy, at the courts of the Sargonid kings.¹²³ Another novelty in the "Garden Scene"

is the introduction into a paradisiac environment of the somber element of a decapitated head. Both of our two previous pilot images, the “investiture” painting and the “sacred tree” panel of Ashurnasirpal II, do present the garden or the tree as a staged or graded element of mediation with respect to a higher divine realm. But they do not show it as an overtly problematic phenomenon. It is perhaps only in the Mari painting that the indeterminate or unfulfilled characteristics of the outer scene signal the inherent complications of terrestrial domains of eternity.

While such domains can be conceived as the first step into transcendence, unless transcendence is definitively fulfilled through a proper exit from all temporal contingency, remaining permanently and indefinitely within them may ultimately be perceived as a hindrance from further progress within a process of spiritual liberation.¹²⁴ The decapitated head might also be a highly implicit code for this complication, in tandem with its signaling the inherent problems in wealth and lusciousness, which otherwise have the potential to stand for a paradisiac beyond or eternity.

A VERGILIAN MODEL

Perhaps, the only tradition in the ancient Mediterranean world in which the idea of a paradisiac “golden age” is overshadowed by negative connotations and seen as less than an ideal state is found in Vergil. The Vergilian notion of a historically remote golden age was inherited from a remoter classical, Hesiodic, prototype, in which the era is associated with the god Kronos, Roman Saturn, in many respects the classical counterpart of the ancient Mesopotamian god Enki/Ea.¹²⁵ To many classical scholars, the most immediate Near Eastern counterpart to the ancient Greek cosmogonic succession myth is the Hurro-Hittite Kumarbi cycle. Not to be neglected, however, is the Babylonian poem of cosmogony, *Enuma Elish*.¹²⁶ In the Greek account, Kronos is ousted by the new ruler of the cosmos, the warlike Zeus, Roman Jupiter or Jove, just as Enki/Ea, after deposing his forebear Apsû, is in turn marginalized by Marduk in the Babylonian poem. Like Kronos, Enki/Ea, too, is ruler over a primordial and paradisiac cosmos, the Apsû.¹²⁷

In Vergil, the golden age, an idyllic Saturnian realm of abundance, in which there is no labor, is susceptible to degeneration and decay on account of its lack of arms and universality.¹²⁸ The Vergilian model proposes the alternative in the form of a Jovian order, perfected or transfigured by virtue of its elimination of regular warfare, which would not only be pacific but also universal.¹²⁹ This perfected Jovian order, however, would be attained only after much strife and battles stretching into the distant future. But once in place, it would be permanent and incorruptible, the paradigm not only for the Roman *imperium*, but also for all apocalyptic perspectives of empire.¹³⁰

Indeed, this scheme is structurally identical to the way in which I have proposed to read images of the winged disk alighting a stylized tree, as seen in the art of the Mittanian and Assyrian empires (Figs. 1, 3, and 12–13). If the tree is the symbol of paradisiac eternity, the counterpart of a Saturnian golden age, the winged disk surmounting it, an image emphatically associated with royal or imperial supremacy, is the counterpart of a *transfigured* Jovian order. Indeed, the Late Assyrian winged disk is the visual expression of divine military strength with a military god holding or wielding weapons also inhabiting it. This military guise of the solar disk can be seen on the so-called Broken Obelisk from Nineveh, even though the sun here is not winged;¹³¹ the glazed brick panels of Tukulti-Ninurta II at Assur;¹³² and the throne room battle reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud (Fig. 14). Elsewhere, I argued, again through a Vergilian model, that in the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II, the battle scenes stand for the armed conflicts that eventually lead to a perfected cosmic order. This is an order that extends beyond any conception of a terrestrial paradise, as embodied by the Assyrian "sacred tree," ultimately surmounted, or superseded, by the very divine agent behind the armed conflicts, the winged disk, in the same space (Fig. 3).¹³³

In the final analysis, what might be thought of as utterly antithetical and inferior to paradisiac peace, warfare and conflict, in their transfigured state of "holy war," would lead to a state of perfection and order that is far superior to any notion of paradisiac bliss. It is in this context that one should understand the weapons conferred on the king by the gods or those used by the god inside the winged disk in Assyrian art, rather than thinking of them solely as insignia of divinely sanctioned military activity for the expansion and consolidation of the Assyrian imperial territory. In apocalyptic narratives from later Near Eastern antiquity as well, battles and conflict between forces of good and evil characterize the final stages of a cosmic order in crisis before it is renewed permanently.¹³⁴

It is highly likely that Vergil's mythical paradigms for the Roman *imperium* were not solely his original creations and that he had access to sources that went back to remoter antiquity, especially the ancient Near East, across the truly intercultural and cosmopolitan Hellenistic period.¹³⁵ As the first world empire in history, the Neo-Assyrian Empire, with its roots and intellectual bases in the earlier antiquity of the Akkadian Dynasty, the Middle Bronze Age, and the Late Bronze Age, likely contained the imperial paradigms that also nourished the ideologies of the later ancient empires in the greater Mediterranean and the Near East. The sense of sacral history and eschatology in Vergil's poems, especially the *Aeneid*, is extremely rich, wide-ranging, and complex, perhaps as elaborate as that found in ancient Iranian traditions.¹³⁶ Scholars have pointed out how Vergil's scheme is one that goes beyond the synoptic five ages found in Hesiod. Rather than a

circular return to the primordial Saturnian golden age, the *Aeneid* presents a scheme whereby a superior and wider-ranging Jovian order will be inaugurated in a capacity that will not degenerate again.¹³⁷

Far from being an innovative re-interpretation of, or elaboration on, Hesiod's "Myth of the Ages," Vergil's scheme could be drawing on already existing ideas or schools of cosmology and eschatology, plausibly going back to Babylonian, Assyrian, and Iranian antiquity, and should be considered as having preserved the core of a pristine continuum. Indeed, there have been attempts to contextualize Vergil's eschatological scheme within wider eastern Mediterranean, Hellenistic, and Near Eastern milieus that encompass the eastern Sibylline Oracles as well as Jewish and Christian Messianic notions.¹³⁸ Babylonia, Assyria, and Iran may all be thought of as constituting the historical background to these cosmopolitan developments, as attested particularly by aspects of their intellectual thought and regal art, explored in the foregoing chapters.

The Sibylline Oracles originated primarily in the Diaspora, and aimed to bring before a Hellenistic audience views belonging to the Jewish religious, political, and mythological world.¹³⁹ Commenting on the third of the Sibylline books, which is the most relevant to some of the themes found in Vergil's poems, such as the idea of a new ruler from heaven,¹⁴⁰ Collins draws attention to the relevance of the ancient Near East:

Sib III conforms to the standard pattern of political eschatological oracles. It expects a transformation of the earth, to be brought about by the advent of a king. This transformation involves a tremendous change in quality, but no break in continuity. There is no resurrection of the dead and no destruction of the world. Basically, those oracles have an optimistic outlook on their situation. Even though the present is not considered ideal, it is thought that an ideal state can be reached within the ordinary course of history. This hope arises out of the royal ideologies which were common, with some modifications, in all the cultures of the ancient Near East.¹⁴¹

In addition to the sibylline corpus, the intertestamental, or apocalyptic, Jewish writings, especially those that pertain to Enoch, must also be thought of as mediating between Assyria and the Vergilian model presented here.¹⁴² An example that resonates with the ancient Mesopotamian antediluvian tradition, so important to the art of Ashurnasirpal II, can be found in *2 Enoch*, where "Melkisedek is born before the flood and assumed to heaven to appear later at the end of time. Again, in the Melkisedek Scroll from Qumran, Melkisedek appears as an eschatological saving figure."¹⁴³ He is expected to remain in an "edenic" transitional realm "forever," only to manifest himself again at the end of time as the initiator of a new order that will remain permanent.¹⁴⁴

According to the Qumran fragments, Melchisedek also has the role of a heavenly "holy warrior" or "warrior-priest" who conducts battles against demonic forces.¹⁴⁵ Thus, it is clear that the idea of endless duration, or temporal eternity, is not incompatible with the idea of a point at which the seat of that endlessness produces, gives way, or leads to a "greater order of things," which in turn has significant military implications.

According to Collins, Jewish messianic or apocalyptic ideas, far from having developed in a vacuum, were very much part of a larger Hellenistic Near Eastern intellectual milieu that "looked not only to the great leaders of the past but also to the ancient myths to provide meaningful paradigms for the present, and especially to the myths of kingship and creation."¹⁴⁶ Collins pinpoints "the renewed interest in the Babylonian myths in the Hellenistic period and the use of Egyptian myth in political prophecy" as analogies "for the resurgence of ancient myth in Jewish apocalyptic."¹⁴⁷ Additionally, Collins aptly emphasizes how the cultural similarities found "throughout the Hellenistic Near East are due primarily to the fact that traditions which had much in common to begin with (e.g., the idea of the kingship of the national deity) were subjected to the same new circumstances," namely the loss of native kingship in different countries.¹⁴⁸ Last but not least, Helge Kvanvig discussed in detail the indebtedness of the Enoch tradition to ancient Mesopotamian antiquity.¹⁴⁹ In sum, eschatology in Vergil is difficult to divorce from its Hellenistic background, of which ancient Near Eastern thought was an integral part. To that end, this dimension of Vergil's work, itself set within parameters of empire, in turn, has the potential to enrich and illuminate discussions of eschatology within the ancient Near East.

ISHTAR AND "HOLY WAR"

The simultaneous Assyrian interest in weapons, warfare, paradisiac notions expressed through "sacred trees" and gardens, and celestial conceptualizations of divinity, be it Ashur or Ishtar, should lead us to operate within such cosmological and apocalyptic parameters in approaching this art. This approach would certainly not be incompatible with the endeavor of analyzing narrative in the visual arts and royal inscriptions for an outline and details of Assyrian political and military history, often expounded rather realistically in the relevant representations.

Ishtar's warlike nature is clear in the Neo-Assyrian hymns quoted by Barbara Nevling Porter and W. G. Lambert in their studies on Ishtar of Nineveh and Ishtar of Arbela.¹⁵⁰ We have also noted that the goddess appears in the "investiture" painting as the *kriegerische* Ishtar, with her military attributes (Fig. 7). In the painting as well, an understanding of Ishtar's warlike connotations cannot be confined to a perspective that focuses on the contemporary military

affairs of Mari, such as the threats to which it was subject from the forces of Hammurapi. Likewise, in the "Garden Scene," the weapons placed on the table, whether they are Ashurbanipal's or the enemy's, are meaningful only within the symbolic framework that juxtaposes the pleasures of a garden with the sacral implications of warfare and empire (Fig. 51). During the reign of Ashurbanipal, the emphasis on the prophetic tradition and Ishtar as the goddess of prophecy went side by side with her depiction in contemporary texts, such as the Prayer to Ishtar in Cylinder B and the Nineveh *Ishtar Temple Inscription*, as the cosmic warrior, on a par with Marduk and Ashur in Babylonian and Assyrian recensions of the poem of cosmogony, *Enūma Elish*.¹⁵¹

In both the "investiture" painting and the "Garden Scene," the presence of Ishtar, directly or indirectly in the visual program of the compositions, must refer to the ultimate potency of renewal and regeneration possessed by this divinity and her overwhelming cosmic forces, an embodiment of celestial enlightenment and transcendence beyond any ordinary conception of warfare and sexuality. In this regard, the typical Assyriological view that confines Ishtar strictly to a domain of carnal love and military action should be reviewed in a manner in which metaphysical notions implied by sexuality and warfare are also encompassed for a much more complex, indeed mystical, understanding of this goddess in ancient Mesopotamian religion.¹⁵²

CLOSURE TO THE "GARDEN SCENE"

The "Garden Scene" of Ashurbanipal dates from an era of the Neo-Assyrian Empire when both the "sacred tree" and the winged disk had long been obsolete in the large-scale imagery of the relief slabs. These motifs, however, continued their existence in small-scale incised decorations on the garments worn by the royal figure, maintaining in a subtle way the co-existence of the "historical" and primeval so characteristic of the throne room reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II.¹⁵³ Within this new rubric, we can expect the Assyrian artist to have come up with other iconographic strategies in the expression of hieratic concepts. The "Garden Scene" is a case in point; this relief slab is not a straightforward expression of triumph over the enemy. Rather, it is the Late Assyrian equivalent of a *mandala*, a roadmap to supreme liberation, a dissection of the cosmos the way it is and will be. I have proposed that the decapitated head hanging from a tree, with its connotations of death, decay, and transience, is an encoded statement that paradisiac bliss or longevity is susceptible to deterioration, or that it is far from being the ultimate state of transcendence. Ultimate transcendence, in turn, is embodied more appropriately by the figure of the enthroned queen wearing the mural crown. The mural crown as a civic form, with its connotations of the city, or the "eternal city," here Nineveh, is beyond and superior to the paradisiac garden

with all its connotations of bliss and longevity. I have noted in [Chapter 2](#) the juxtaposition between culture and nature found in the central panel of the Mari painting through the architectural implications of the ring and rod and the paradisiac connotations of the flowing vase. An analogous juxtaposition underlies the "Garden Scene" as well, with the transcendence expressed through culture and a civic form, the mural crown, set against the transcendence expressed through forms of nature, trees, birds, and the grapevine canopy, but tainted by the decapitated head.¹⁵⁴

The "Garden Scene" is a complex image; it would be impossible to claim to have answered all the questions about its iconography. I would nevertheless emphasize the quality of this scene as a semantic puzzle, an enigma, and the necessity in its study to adopt tracks alternative to its usual interpretation. Rather than military and imperial expansion or assimilation as an end in itself, the image is loaded with philosophical symbolism. As Moortgat pointed out more than half a century ago, the image is one of the last representatives of a three-millennium long tradition of ancient Mesopotamian art focused on the fundamental concepts of the renewal of life and conquest of death. My interpretive attempt has proposed to take a further step to locate its discussion within conceptions of sacral time and eschatology, relating its iconography more closely to the key images of its ancient Near Eastern heritage, the "investiture" painting and the throne room "sacred tree" panel of Ashurnasirpal II.

EPILOGUE

This study has not exhausted the possible layers of meaning embedded in the regal art of the ancient Near East of the eras and cultures it has dealt with. There should always be more we can say by continuing to look at the works of art and monuments themselves with ever fresh eyes. This essay is nevertheless an exhortation to view the visual arts of the ancient Near East as a much more unified and programmatic phenomenon across the ages than hitherto encouraged or allowed in the study of the ancient Near East. It is equally a plea for seeing them from an angle that is much more aligned and commensurate with patterns of religious thought shared by the cultures and traditions of the ancient Near Eastern world.

This programmatic component in the art of the ancient Near East is not the same as a single artist's or team's coordinating a project constituted by multiple images within a single venue, such as the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II from the ancient Near East or the Sistine Chapel ceiling from the Italian Renaissance.¹ And yet, there still is a common story that most of the images that we have looked at tell. They revolve around the phenomenon of the merging of man with god, that of the finite with the infinite, and the liberation of the human being from the bonds of time and death through a supra-solar or astral destiny.² These matters have hardly been on the agenda of the scholars of the ancient Near East in approaching the visual arts in the recent years, but their expression through regal art is one of the most systematic aspects of the cultures we have dealt with. It was these matters that iconographers in the

ancient Near East were initiated into, and they expressed them programmatically in their craftsmanship.

In order to probe this visual language conscientiously and address more appropriately the metaphysics of the art of the ancient Near East, one needs to extend, if not from time to time step outside, the current parameters prescribed for historical and archaeological inquiry. The content of this visual language is fully available within the cultures that produced the relevant images. But the images may be telling stories entirely different from those absorbed by our modern audiences. Whereas the answers are by no means alien to the cultures studied, they often lie outside the referents of the motifs and figures as determined by the modern scholarly biases.

Here lies the crypticism of the art of the ancient Near East. On the one hand, in it there is something quite familiar to the scholar of the ancient Near East. Vegetal, floral, and aquatic designs connote fertility and abundance; fantastic creatures and stylized trees not easily identified botanically are *apotropaia*; royal insignia mean religious legitimacy; the royal figure means the human king maintaining the link between society and divinity; and so on. On the other hand, the modern audience is not entirely attuned to the sacral concepts that underlie these elements. But the crypticism of the art of the ancient Near East is inherent. Even in its own time, access to its significance was limited to its producers and its initiated audiences.

Within the current scholarly trends, we are happier with interpretations that see in our images elements of the geographic environment, administration, economy, political ambitions, ritual practices, apotropaic functions, and dynastic legitimization of their contemporary producers than we are with meaning systems that operate above and beyond such particularities. The Mari painting, which has been my focus of attention, is an excellent case in point. Surely few scholars of the ancient Near East today would insist on seeing in the painting depictions of actual spaces within the Mari religious or palatial architecture. However, equally few scholars would be willing to acknowledge that there is in the painting a great deal more than a historical Mari king's being presented by the goddess Ishtar with legitimate kingship, his making in turn his land fertile and prosperous as expressed by the trees and the flowing vases, and the cosmic order upheld by his successful kingship. In the same vein, many today would consider this painting a conduit for its artist's communicating through his original art the unique identity of his polity, which is emphatically not a northwestern offshoot of the Babylonian one. Equally welcome would be a reading of the image in light of a specific festival attested in, say, the written sources of Mari in the Old Babylonian period and a specific role played in it by Ishtar.

Along similar lines, it is perhaps more commensurate with modern understandings of ancient religion to see a manifestation of "ancestor worship" in the

throne room “sacred tree” panel of Ashurnasirpal II, with the two royal figures flanking the tree representing, in a rational way, the king’s forefathers, Tukulti-Ninurta II and Adad-nirari II, both named by convention in the formulaic titulary of the so-called Standard Inscription,³ than to invoke matters such as ascent to heaven, let alone shamanism. There certainly is something quite appealing, if not comforting, to the rational mind in seeing in the Assyrian “sacred tree” the representation of a concrete cult object.⁴ As for the “Garden Scene,” many would not consider as problematic a decapitated enemy’s head hanging from a tree in a garden that is the venue for a victory celebration. After all, of all ancient peoples, we are dealing with the Assyrians, who are known for their carnage and cruelty. In their art, *of course* they showed what did take place, only in accordance with their “ideology.”⁵

Whereas the principal agenda of this book is not a critique of the long-standing status quo in the study of the art of the ancient Near East, it is impossible to avoid such a revisionist activity in presenting even a simple point about this artistic tradition that does not fall within the established comfort zone. But in closing, let us remember our simple point. An apocalyptic perspective may have been more at home in the ancient Near East than we are apt to think. In light of the fact that purely philosophical or speculative writings in the discursive mode hardly existed in ancient western Asia, one of the best media for its expression would have been the visual arts, particularly “regal art.”

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

Aspects of the thoughts and arguments presented in this introduction have also been covered in my contribution “Reconstructing Artistic Environments,” in Ann C. Gunter, ed., *A Companion to the Art of the Ancient Near East* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, in press).

- 1 The three diachronic studies are Elizabeth Douglas Van Buren, *The Flowing Vase and the God with Streams* (Berlin: H. Schoetz, 1933); Henri Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996 [1958]); Anton Moortgat, *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia: The Classical Art of the Near East*, trans. Judith Filson (London and New York: Phaidon, 1969). Also relevant are H. A. Groenewegen-Frankfort, *Arrest and Movement: An Essay on Space and Time in the Representational Art of the Ancient Near East* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987 [1951]), a brilliant but rather idiosyncratic essay; and the work of Helene Kantor, such as *The Aegean and the Orient in the Second Millennium BC* (Bloomington, IN: Principia, with the assistance of the Institute for Aegean Prehistory, 1997 [1947]), cited here, even though her work has a more distinctly chronological than iconographical focus.
- 2 A criticism of the Assyriological biases in the study of the visual arts is voiced lucidly in Zainab Bahrani, “Performativity and the Image: Narrative, Representation, and the Uruk Vase,” in Erica Ehrenberg, ed., *Leaving No Stones Unturned: Essays on the Ancient Near East and Egypt in Honor of Donald P. Hansen*, 15–22 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002) 15.
- 3 For critical observations on the attitude of Archaeology toward monumental and representational visual culture in the study of ancient Egypt, see John Baines, “Communication and

Display: The Integration of Early Egyptian Art and Writing,” chap. in *Visual and Written Culture in Ancient Egypt*, 281–97 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) esp. 295–97.

- 4 The visual arts are not the only realm that displays these qualities. On tradition and continuum in ancient Mesopotamian scribal culture, not only in technical and curricular but also ideological matters, see Francesca Rochberg, *The Heavenly Writing: Divination, Horoscopy, and Astronomy in Mesopotamian Culture* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 3.
- 5 See above, n. 1; Marie-Thérèse Barrelet, “Une peinture de la cour 106 du palais de Mari,” in André Parrot, ed., *Studia Mariana*, 9–35 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1950).
- 6 *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art: Essays on the Creation of an Iconography of Empire*, Acta Iranica 19 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979). A comparable endeavor highlighting continuity in tropes and visual formulas surrounding royal self-representation in the ancient Near East from the third millennium through the Achaemenid Persian period, citing aspects of the former study, is Joan Westenholz, “King, the Emperor, and the Empire: Continuity and Discontinuity of Royal Representation in Text and Image,” in Sanno Aro and R. M. Whiting, eds., *The Heirs of Assyria: Proceedings of the Opening Symposium of the Assyrian and Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project Held in Tvärmine, Finland, October 8–11, 1998*, 99–125, Melammu Symposia 1 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2000).
- 7 *Tammuz: Der Unsterblichkeitsglaube in der vorderasiatischen Bildkunst* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1949).
- 8 Moortgat, *Tammuz*, 22–26. In fact, Moortgat (*ibid.*, 25) asks why texts do not explicitly talk about these matters.

- 9 *Ibid.*, 131–33. See also Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 133, and the more detailed discussion below in [Chapter 5](#).
- 10 *Tammuz*, 117 and 146, for Tell-Halaf and the Achaemenid Empire, respectively.
- 11 “The Role of Religion in Achaemenian Imperialism,” in Nicole Brisch, ed., *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond*, Oriental Institute Seminars 4, 221–41 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2008), which is also Chapter 9: “Sacred Kingship?” in Bruce Lincoln, *“Happiness for Mankind:” Achaemenian Religion and the Imperial Project*, Acta Iranica 53 (Leuven, Paris, and Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2012) 167–86. Lincoln, however, seems to regard any treatment of sacral kingship as though it must fall into the Frazerian realm of thought, favoring rather the alternative formulation of a “theology of empire.” As appropriate as the latter phrase is, here, I do not eschew the phrase and phenomenon of “sacral kingship” out of any Frazerian fears, as there are enough evidence and data from the cultures of the ancient Near East that warrant a treatment of concepts such as renewal and immortality in association with kingship.
- 12 “Role of Religion,” 223. Within the confines of this essay, however, Lincoln does not clarify whether this restoration strictly circles back to the beginning or goes beyond it in reaching perfected levels of “happiness for mankind”; nor does he specify the doctrine he has in mind as, say, Zoroastrian or Old Iranian.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 *King and Kingship*, 267–72.
- 15 “The Parthenon Frieze and the Apadana Reliefs at Persepolis: Reassessing a Programmatic Relationship,” *AJA* 89 (1985) 103–20, esp. 112–13. See also Margaret Cool Root, “Defining the Divine in Achaemenid Persian Kingship: The View from Bisitun,” in Lynette Mitchell and Charles Melville, eds., *Every Inch a King: Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, 23–65 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2003) 56–57, where ancient Egyptian scenes of judgment before Osiris are referred to as “Last Judgment scenes.”
- 16 Beyond the brief treatment in Lincoln’s article (“Role of Religion”) cited above, the most comprehensive and focused study so far is Abolala Soudavar, *The Aura of Kings: Legitimacy and Divine Sanction in Iranian Kingship*, Bibliotheca Iranica: Intellectual Traditions 10 (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2003), which, however, does not address eschatology, focusing rather on the concept of the *khvarna*.
- 17 Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- 18 *Tammuz*, 97–99.
- 19 The “ruling prophecy” of the *Aeneid* (1.279) promises Rome an “empire without end” (*imperium sine fine*), discussed in Eve Adler, *Vergil’s Empire: Political Thought in the Aeneid* (Lanham, MD, Boulder, CO, New York, and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003) 160.
- 20 Dina Katz, “Time in Death and Afterlife: The Concept of Time and the Belief in Afterlife,” in L. Feliu et al., *Time and History in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 56th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Barcelona, 26–30 July 2010*, 117–25 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013) 119.
- 21 “Art in Empire: The Royal Image and the Visual Dimensions of Assyrian Ideology,” in S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting, eds., *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Helsinki, September 7–11, 1995*, 359–81 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997). In this regard, see also Jerrold S. Cooper, “Mesopotamian Historical Consciousness and the Production of Monumental Art in the Third Millennium B.C.,” in Ann C. Gunter, ed., *Investigating Artistic Environments in the Ancient Near East*, 39–51 (Washington, DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 1990).
- 22 The relevant scholarly literature is by now quite rich. Most recently, see Amar Annus, “On the Origin of Watchers: A Comparative Study of the Antediluvian Wisdom in Mesopotamian and Jewish Traditions,” *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha* 19 (2010) 277–320, esp. 288–91; Alan Lenzi, *Secrecy and the Gods: Secret Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia and Biblical Israel*, State Archives of Assyria Studies 19 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2008) esp. 135–219, where the colophon of secrecy is seen as characterizing texts belonging to the corpora of the five primary scholarly disciplines of ancient Mesopotamia especially during the first millennium BCE, and used “inconsistently,” since not all texts belonging to these corpora bear it. One wonders,

however, if, rather than a matter of inconsistency, we lack a full understanding of which texts were appropriate to be accompanied by the colophon.

- 23 *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, and London: Harper and Row, 1972 [1939]) 7–17, esp. 15–16, where Panofsky refers to this faculty as “synthetic intuition,” and emphasizes its being subject to a control mechanism through “insight into historical processes the sum total of which may be called *tradition*.”
- 24 *Tammuz*, esp. 30, in relation to the art of the Late Uruk Period, as well as *ibid.*, 79–81, on Tammuz as the child of life-giving water, who dies in the summer and is reborn in the spring, his rebirth being connected with the goddess Inanna. Moortgat further points out that this belief, originally rooted in Uruk, spread to the entire land of Sumer with its many local city gods.
- 25 It is important, however, to see complex underlying levels of meaning in the Gilgamesh cycle before accepting Gilgamesh all too readily as the paragon of failure to find immortality. The paradoxical nature of the relation between the seeker of eternal life and its guardian, usually an ophidian being, in ancient myth is dealt with by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy in “The Guardians of the Sundoor and the Sagittarian Type,” chap. in *Guardians of the Sun-Door: Late Iconographic Essays of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy*, ed. Robert A. Strom, 21–64 (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2004) 26–28, where the argument is that it would be a mistake to take this opposition in the pejorative sense, as both the seeker and the defender are co-extensive. For an incorporation of Coomaraswamy’s observations in this regard into an analysis of the imagery of mythical conflict and the royal hunt in the art of Assyria, see Mehmet-Ali Ataç, “Representations and Resonances of Gilgamesh in Neo-Assyrian Art,” in Hans Ulrich Steymans, ed., *Gilgamesch: Ikonographie eines Helden / Gilgamesh: Epic and Iconography*, 261–86, *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 245 (Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2010).
- 26 *Tammuz*, 93–96.
- 27 For an alternative reading of the message of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* as the attainment or promise of immortality, not necessarily in the flesh, rather than the loss thereof, as well as a critique

of the typical Assyriological perspective that sees Gilgamesh as childish and his quest as a failure, see Mehmet-Ali Ataç, “‘Angelology’ in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*,” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 4 (2004) 3–28.

- 28 According to Mircea Eliade, whose work is still among the most authoritative on shamanism, “[t]he pre-eminently shamanic technique is the passage from one cosmic region to another – from earth to the sky or from earth to the underworld. The shaman knows the mystery of the break-through in plane” (*Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series 76 [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004 (1964)] 259). Eliade (*ibid.*, 4–5) further identifies shamanism as a technique of ecstasy, and characterizes the shaman as one who “specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld.” The implications of Gilgamesh’s breaking free from the bonds of the known world have been addressed in Christopher Woods, “At the Edge of the World: Cosmological Conceptions of the Eastern Horizon in Mesopotamia,” *JANER* 9 (2009) 183–239, esp. 200–201, where the wisdom acquired by Gilgamesh on his journey is seen as derived directly from antediluvian knowledge and not construed as a childish person’s growing up and realizing that he will never avoid death.
- 29 Eliade, *Shamanism*, 4.
- 30 See, for instance, Jeremy Naydler, *Shamanic Wisdom in the Pyramid Texts: The Mystical Tradition of Ancient Egypt* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2013), where it is argued that rather than funerary or post-mortem concerns, what is recorded in the Old Kingdom *Pyramid Texts* are phenomena connected with the world beyond the senses experienced while one was still alive (*ibid.*, 48). On contacts between central Asian shamanism and the early philosophy of ancient Greece, see the works of Peter Kingsley, most recently, *A Story Waiting to Pierce You: Mongolia, Tibet and the Destiny of the Western World* (Point Reyes Station, CA: The Golden Sufi Center, 2010). For a highly skeptical view that questions the relevance of a cross-cultural and “perennialist” understanding of shamanism, referred to as “pan-shamanism,” especially in relation to the work of Eliade as well as regarding Pythagoras and ancient Greece, see Leonid

- Zhmud, *Pythagoras and the Early Pythagoreans*, trans. Kevin Windle and Rosh Ireland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012 [1994]) 207–20. On the use of ecstatic techniques in the cult of Ishtar and ancient Mesopotamian prophecy, see Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, State Archives of Assyria 9 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997) XVI and XLVI. See also Herbert B. Huffinon, “A Company of Prophets: Mari, Assyria, Israel,” in Martti Nissinen, ed., *Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives*, 47–70 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000) 48, which sees “inspiration through ecstasy, dreams, or what may be called ‘inner illumination’” as key to prophecy. In Martti Nissinen, with contributions by C. L. Seow and Robert K. Ritner, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, Writings from the Ancient World 12 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 6, Nissinen, too, uses the phrase “altered state of mind” to characterize the prophetic practice of “receiving and transmitting divine words.”
- 31 See, for example, David Lewis-Williams, “Constructing a Cosmos: Architecture, Power and Domestication at Çatalhöyük,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 4/1 (2004) 28–59.
- 32 “Schamanismus als Urreligion? Gedanken zu den Grenzen der Altorientalistik,” in Barbara Böck, Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, and Thomas Richter, eds., *Munuscula Mesopotamica: Festschrift für Johannes Renger*, 69–78 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1999) 72–73.
- 33 See, for instance, Ian Hodder, “Çatalhöyük: A Brief Introduction to the Site, the Project, and the Exhibit,” in Mine Haydaroglu, ed., *Topraktan Sonsuzluğa Çatalhöyük / Çatalhöyük: From Earth to Eternity*, 9–25 (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi, 2006) 21.
- 34 See Klaus Schmidt, *Sie bauten die ersten Tempel: Das rätselhafte Heiligtum der Steinzeitjäger* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 2008 [2006]) 212–13 and 221–26; Joris Peters and Klaus Schmidt, “Animals in the Symbolic World of Pre-Pottery Neolithic Göbekli Tepe, South-Eastern Turkey: A Preliminary Assessment,” *Anthropozoologica* 39 (2004) 179–218, esp. 212–13, on the connection between the animal art of Göbekli Tepe and shamans, including the probability that the art was produced by the shamans themselves, with the scenes depicted having been informed by the shamans’ own experiences during ecstatic states; as well as the interesting idea that the Göbekli Tepe megaliths are three-dimensional representations of shamans themselves. Another study that sees visual imagery, in this case the “sacred trees” and winged disks of the glyptic of the Kingdom of the Mittani (ca. 1500–1350 BCE), as derived from trance experiences connected with the “highland cultures of the Taurus-Zagros mountains” is Diana Stein, “Winged Disks and Sacred Trees at Nuzi: An Altered Perspective on Two Imperial Motifs,” *Studies on the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians* 18 (2009) 573–603.
- 35 *Sie bauten die ersten Tempel*, 219; Peters and Schmidt, “Animals in the Symbolic World,” 213. According to Eliade (*Shamanism*, 4), the shaman is also “a psychopomp, and he may also be a priest, mystic, and poet.” A scholar of ancient Mesopotamia who has proposed to see greater continuity between prehistoric society and the Uruk “revolution,” the period of state formation and “early high civilization” in Mesopotamia, is Petr Charvát (*Mesopotamia Before History* [London and New York: Routledge, 2002] esp. 120, 131, 153, 155, 159).
- 36 Ann Arbor, MI: Kelsey Museum, 2005.
- 37 “Shamans, Seals, and Magic,” in Root, ed., *This Fertile Land*, 65–72, esp. 69.
- 38 Prague: Charles University in Prague, Karolinum 2005.
- 39 *Iconography of Pristine Statehood*, 73.
- 40 On this “looser” use of the term in archaeological inquiry, see Ian Hodder, *The Leopard’s Tale: Revealing the Mysteries of Çatalhöyük* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2006) 196.
- 41 See the Sumerian poem *The Death of Bilgames*, in which Enlil tells Bilgames his destiny after death: “Be not in despair, be not heart-stricken, / for now [you will number] among the Anunna gods, / [you will act as the governor of the Netherworld,] / [you will pass judgment, you will render verdicts,] / [what you say] will be as weighty [as the word of Ningishzida and Dumuzi] ... The governorship of the Netherworld [*is to be yours*,] / you, your ghost, [*will number among the Anunna gods*,] / you will pass judgment, [you will render verdicts,] / [what you say will be as weighty as the word of Ningishzida and Dumuzi.]” (Andrew George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: A New Translation: The Babylonian Epic Poem*

- and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian [London: Penguin, 1999] 204–205). In this regard, see as well Naydler, *Shamanic Wisdom*, 251, quoting from the ancient Egyptian *Pyramid Texts* to demonstrate the status of the deceased king Unas, “He has not been judged – this Unas has not been judged! / he judges – this Unas judges!” In both Mesopotamia and Egypt, one of the qualities of a divine destiny in the afterlife seems to be the license to judge rather than being subject to judgment. See also Mehmet-Ali Ataç, “The ‘Underworld Vision’ of the Ninevite Intellectual Milieu,” in Dominique Collon and Andrew George, eds., *Nineveh: Papers of the XLIX^e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* London, 7–11 July 2003, vol. 1, 67–76 (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 2005), which argues for the transformative nature of the prince’s experience described in the poem, perhaps resulting in the creation of a human being destined to be an immortal after death in the beyond. In a parallel vein, see Seth Sanders, “The First Tour of Hell: From Neo-Assyrian Propaganda to Early Jewish Revelation,” *JANER* 9 [2009] 151–69, esp. 165.
- 42 See below [Chapters 3](#) and [5](#) for a more detailed discussion.
- 43 See R. D. Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh* (London: The British Museum, 1977) 13, where the compositions are referred to as epic, in which the heroes are the lions; and the artist is an “unknown genius” of Babylonian origin, who may have expressed his “hatred of . . . the oppressor of his native city.” See also Groenewegen-Frankfort, *Arrest and Movement*, 180.
- 44 For editions and translations of the different versions of the Etana and Adapa poems, see J. V. Kinnier Wilson, *The Legend of Etana: A New Edition* (Warminster, UK: Aris and Phillips, 1985); Shlomo Izre’el, *Adapa and the South Wind: Language Has the Power of Life and Death* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001). For a structuralist analysis of the Adapa myth, see Mario Liverani, “Adapa, Guest of the Gods,” chap. in *Myth and Politics in Ancient Near Eastern Historiography*, ed. and trans. Zainab Bahrani and Marc van de Mieroop (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004) 3–26.
- 45 The theme of gods’ withholding eternal life from humanity can be found in barmaid Siduri’s speech to Gilgamesh in the Old Babylonian version of the epic: “O Gilgamesh, where are you wandering? / You cannot find the life that you seek: / when the gods created mankind, / for mankind they established death, / life they kept for themselves” (A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003] vol. 1, 278–79). See, however, Coomaraswamy, “Sagittarian Type,” 26, on how this withholding of life by its guardians is not “miserly in any human sense.”
- 46 See the excellent basic definition of shaman in the introduction of M. L. West, *Orphic Poems* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) 5: “It can fly through the air for immense distances, visit the centre of the world, and pass from there to the several levels of heaven; it can plumb the depths of the sea, or go to the land of the dead.” On the faculties of the shaman, see also Brentjes, “Schamanismus als Urreligion?” 70–71.
- 47 In this regard, see Eliade, *Shamanism*, 188–89 and 493.
- 48 W. F. Albright, “The Mouth of the Rivers,” *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 35 (1919) 161–95; Geo Widengren, *The King and the Tree of Life in Ancient Near Eastern Religion* (King and Saviour 4), Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift 4 (Uppsala: A.-B. Lundequistska; Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1951).
- 49 By Coomaraswamy, see his originally unpublished essays, “The Early Iconography of Sagittarius,” chap. in *Guardians*, 1–20; “Sagittarian Type”; and “*Svayamātṛṇṇā*: Janua Coeli,” chap. in *The Door in the Sky: Coomaraswamy on Myth and Meaning*, 6–61 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), originally published in *Zalmoxis* 2 (1939).
- 50 See Holly Pittman, “Constructing Context: The Gebel el-Arak Knife: Greater Mesopotamian and Egyptian Interaction in the Late Fourth Millennium B.C.E.,” in J. S. Cooper and G. M. Schwartz, eds., *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the Twenty-First Century: The William Foxwell Albright Centennial*, 9–32 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996) 13, on the occurrence of the figural type of the Uruk “priest king” on the Predynastic (Naqada II) Gebel el-Arak Knife as an incident of such center-to-center communication. Perhaps, the clearest manifestation of direct communication

among court elites in the ancient Near East is the corpus of texts known as the Amarna Letters from the Late Bronze Age.

- 51 The most recent comprehensive study is Marian H. Feldman, *Diplomacy by Design: Luxury Arts and an “International Style” in the Ancient Near East, 1400–1200 BCE* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Previously, see also William Stevenson Smith, *Interconnections in the Ancient Near East: A Study of the Relationships between the Arts of Egypt, the Aegean, and Western Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965).
- 52 For a presentation of both rationales and possibilities that go beyond them in comparative activity, see Irene J. Winter, “Opening the Eyes and Opening the Mouth: The Utility of Comparing Images in Worship in India and the Ancient Near East,” in Michael W. Meister, ed., *Ethnography and Personhood: Notes from the Field*, 129–62 (Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat, 2000) 132–33. For an overview of approaches to the comparative method, see also Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, 140. In the field of ancient Greek and Near Eastern literature, see most recently, Johannes Haubold, *Greece and Mesopotamia: Dialogues in Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), which advocates that comparative activity need not be determined by the demonstration of historical contact as long as the shared themes and larger questions in the reading of literary works warrant it. A recent archaeological study that has adopted a much more open-minded and looser approach to comparison is David Wengrow, *The Origins of Monsters: Image and Cognition in the First Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014).
- 53 See, for instance, Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XVI, which questions a deterministic view of historical contact in explaining cultural parallels that might rather reflect “conceptual and doctrinal similarities of the underlying religions,” in this case matters of “similarities between Assyrian and biblical prophecy.” Along similar lines in relation to the visual arts in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, see Mehmet-Ali Ataç, “Visual Formula and Meaning in Neo-Assyrian Relief Sculpture,” *The Art Bulletin* 88 (2006) 69–101. On the acceleration of the process of assimilation and sharing of gods across cultures in the Near East during the Late Bronze Age, see Marc Van De Mieroop, *The Eastern Mediterranean in the Age of Ramesses II* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007) 216.
- 54 For a collection of Coomaraswamy’s critical essays, see the two volumes edited by Roger Lipsey, *Traditional Art and Symbolism* and *Coomaraswamy 2: Selected Papers: Metaphysics*, Bollingen Series 89 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).
- 55 See above, n. 49.
- 56 In this regard, by Irene J. Winter, see especially “Opening the Eyes,” and “Reading Concepts of Space from Ancient Mesopotamian Monuments,” in K. Vatsyayan, ed., *Concepts of Space, Ancient and Modern*, 57–73 (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1991).
- 57 On context in Archaeology as “more problematic than is often allowed,” see the excellent succinct discussion in Lewis-Williams, “Constructing a Cosmos,” 39.
- 58 As expressed by Julian Reade in relation to the banquet scenes from the reigns of the Neo-Assyrian kings Sargon II (721–705 BCE) and Ashurbanipal, “[i]t is seldom if ever possible to compare like with like”; in “Was Sennacherib a Feminist?” in Jean-Marie Durand, ed., *La femme dans le Proche-Orient ancien: Compte rendu de la XXXIII^e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* (Paris, 7–10 juillet 1986), 139–45 (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1987) 140.
- 59 Recent discussions on this potential of images in art historical inquiry include Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps: Histoire de l’art et anachronisme des images* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2000) and Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010). Didi-Huberman (*Devant le temps*, 14–16) points out this “anachronic” aspect of the visual arts as a source of richness that needs to be recognized and integrated into art historical method.
- 60 An example of Akurgal’s work in this regard is *The Art of the Hittites* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1962).
- 61 For an overview, see Mehmet-Ali Ataç, “Egyptian Connections with the Larger World: The Ancient Near East,” in Melinda Hartwig, ed., *A Companion to Ancient Egyptian Art*, 423–46 (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2015).
- 62 Moortgat, *Tammuz*, 30.
- 63 “The New Kingdom ‘Divine’ Temple: The Example of Luxor,” in Byron E. Shafer, ed., *Temples of Ancient Egypt*, 127–84 (Ithaca,

- NY: Cornell University Press, 1997) 129 and n. 10.
- 64 *Ibid.* A recognized concept in the study of ancient Egypt, this duality of temporality is also posited by other Egyptologists, such as Jan Assmann, “La notion d’éternité dans l’Égypte ancienne,” in Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge and Önhan Tunca, eds., *Représentations du temps dans les religions: Actes du Colloque organisé par le Centre d’Histoire des Religions de l’Université de Liège*, 111–22, Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l’Université de Liège (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2003), where the limited human time is referred to as “temps petit” and the divine or cosmic time as “temps grand.”
- 65 On conceptions of linear and cyclical time and their interconnectedness, see Gebhard J. Selz, “Vom ‘vergangenen Geschehen’ zur ‘Zukunftsabwägung’: Überlegungen zur Rolle der Schrift in Ökonomie und Geschichte,” in Barbara Böck, Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, and Thomas Richter, eds., *Munuscula Mesopotamica: Festschrift für Johannes Renger*, 465–512 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1999) esp. 465–70 and 507–12; Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, “Zeit und Ewigkeit: Ein Versuch zu altorientalischen Konzeptionen,” in John Barton et al., eds., *Zeit und Ewigkeit als Raum göttlichen Handelns*, 29–51, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 390 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009) 45. On related matters, see also Johannes Renger, “Vorstellungen von Zeit und Zeitmessung und der Blick auf vergangenes Geschehen in der Überlieferung des alten Mesopotamien,” in Harry Falk, ed., *Vom Herrscher zur Dynastie: Zum Wesen kontinuierlicher Zeitrechnung in Antike und Gegenwart*, 6–26 (Bremen: Hempen, 2002). On conceptions of time, both chronometric and ideal, see Eleanor Robson, “Scholarly Conceptions and Quantifications of Time in Assyria and Babylonia, c. 750–250 BCE,” in Ralph M. Rosen, ed., *Time and Temporality in the Ancient World*, 45–90 (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2004).
- 66 On the ancient Mesopotamian commemorative monument and its capacity to project the past into the future for infinitely many viewings, see Kathryn Slanski, “Classification, Historiography, and Monumental Authority: The Babylonian Entitlement *Narûs* (*Kudurrus*),” *JCS* 52 (2000) 95–114, esp. 98–99, 103, and 112–14; Zainab Bahrani, *Rituals of War: The Body and Violence in Mesopotamia* (New York: Zone Books, 2008) 125.
- 67 See Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 134, on the Egyptian origins of the winged disk and the “immense prestige of Egyptian kingship” that warranted its dissemination to western Asia. On the winged disk as an intercultural image symbolizing head deities or ruler gods in neighboring ancient Near Eastern traditions, see Tallay Ornan, “A Complex System of Religious Symbols: The Case of the Winged-Disk in First-Millennium Near Eastern Imagery,” in C. E. Suter and Ch. Uehlinger, eds., *Crafts and Images in Contact: Studies on Eastern Mediterranean Art of the 1st millennium BCE*, 207–241, *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 210 (Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2005).
- 68 See, for instance, Hans Goedicke, “Unity and Diversity in the Oldest Religion of Ancient Egypt,” in Hans Goedicke and J. J. M. Roberts, eds., *Unity and Diversity: Essays in the History, Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East*, 201–17 (Baltimore, MD and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975) 206–7, for the argument that the winged disk symbolized the sun-god Re, a theological speculation conceived for the first time in Dynasty 2 (ca. 2890–2686 BCE), so that a bridge could be established between the distant celestial Horus and the human embodiment of divine rule on earth.
- 69 A proposal for seeing the Neo-Assyrian historical narrative in relief sculpture from this perspective is Mehmet-Ali Ataç, “The Changing Approaches to History in the Neo-Assyrian Palace Reliefs,” in Feliu et al., *Time and History*, 583–98.
- 70 On this aspect of ancient Egyptian king lists, especially the so-called Turin Canon, see Donald B. Redford, *Pharaonic King-Lists, Annals and Day-Books: A Contribution to the Study of the Egyptian Sense of History*, SSEA Publication 4 (Mississauga, ON: Benben, 1986) xx; Barry J. Kemp, *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007 [2006]) 61–65 and 92.
- 71 For the classical and ancient Near Eastern backdrop of the Judeo-Christian “paradise tradition,” see A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and*

- the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966) 11–47; Jean Delumeau, *History of Paradise: The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition* (New York: Continuum, 1995) 3–21. In this regard, see also M. L. West, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 349–50.
- 72 For a case study from the Old Hittite kingdom (ca. 1650–1400 BCE), the *Edict of Telipinu*, see Mario Liverani, “Telipinu, or: On Solidarity,” chap. in *Myth and Politics*, 27–52. Another example is the text on Tutankhamun’s “Restoration Stela,” commemorating this king’s taking over the government of ancient Egypt after the Amarna period (ca. 1352–1336 BCE), for a translation and discussion of which, see, most recently, John Baines, “Presenting and Discussing Deities in New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period Egypt,” in Beate Pongratz-Leisten, ed., *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism*, 41–89 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011) 50–51.
- 73 There are, however, certain complications in Hesiod’s “Myth of the Ages,” on account of the “virtuous” intrusion of the generation of heroes between the races of bronze and iron. On this question, see Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore, MD and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981 [1979]) 154–55, citing J.-P. Vernant, “Le mythe hésiodique des races: Essai d’analyse structurale,” *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 157 (1960) 21–54; Ludwig Koenen, “Greece, the Near East, and Egypt: Cyclic Destruction in Hesiod and the *Catalogue of Women*,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 124 (1994) 1–34, esp. 8.
- 74 For a translation of the relevant passages, see Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List*, The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Assyriological Studies 11 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939) 77–127. More recently, see also the translation in Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 117–26, where the text is titled *The Chronicle of the Single Monarchy* and the relevant phrase is rendered, in English translation, as “was defeated.”
- 75 See Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005 [1954]) 136, for the emphasis among “archaic” cultures on “the attempt to give value to history on the cosmic plane; that is, to regard historical events and catastrophes as genuine cosmic combustions or dissolutions that must periodically put an end to the universe in order to permit its regeneration.”
- 76 Such outreach has been the endeavor of the Melammu Symposia, the first two volumes of which offer valuable perspectives for the present study as well. See above, n. 6; and R. M. Whiting, ed., *Mythology and Mythologies: Methodological Approaches to Intercultural Influences: Proceedings of the Second Annual Symposium of the Assyrian and Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project Held in Paris, France, October 4–7, 1999*, Melammu Symposia 2 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001).
- 77 In this regard, see Julian Reade, *Assyrian Sculpture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) 5; Ada Cohen and Steven E. Kangas, “Our Nineveh Enterprise,” in Ada Cohen and Steven E. Kangas, eds., *Assyrian Reliefs from the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II: A Cultural Biography*, 1–45 (Hanover, NH: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College and University Press of New England, 2010) esp. 10–13, highlighting the mid-nineteenth-century religious reception and reading of Assyrian visual imagery, particularly in the United States.
- 78 *The Apocalyptic Movement: Introduction and Interpretation*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1975) 106–10.
- 79 For discussions of the links of Gnosticism with a resurgence in the Hellenistic period of the wisdom of the ancient Near East, such as that of Egypt, Babylonia, and Iran, see Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1958) esp. 23–25 and 33–34. Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trans. Robert McLahlan Wilson (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983) 327, also acknowledges the importance of ancient Mesopotamian religious traditions in the crystallization of the “gnostic world religion.” For a study of the parallels between aspects of ancient Mesopotamian descent and cosmogonic myths and Manichaeism, including a case made for historical transmission, see Mehmet-Ali Ataç, “Manichaeism and Ancient Mesopotamian ‘Gnosticism,’” *JANER* 5 (2005) 1–40.
- 80 For a lucid treatment of the definitions of “apocalypse,” “apocalyptic,” and

- “apocalypticism,” see Frederick J. Murphy, *Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012) 1–26.
- 81 *Ibid.*, 4–10, with emphasis on cosmological knowledge, eschatology, and the future as matters of key relevance to the apocalyptic.
- 82 For the definition of “apocalypse” as a literary genre, see John J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” in John J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, 1–20, *Semeia* 14 (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1979) 9.
- 83 Schmithals, *Apocalyptic Movement*, 17.
- 84 Collins, “Introduction,” 2. Schmithals (*Apocalyptic Movement*, 14) defines the apocalyptic “as a set of truths which are not generally accessible and do not at once result from the rational consideration of reality, but must be revealed to man, must be announced to him from beyond himself.”
- 85 Schmithals, *Apocalyptic Movement*, 29. Schmithals (*ibid.*, 51) singles out the Book of Daniel and the Revelation of John as “the two more or less apocalyptic books of the Bible.” In this regard, see also Robert R. Wilson, “The Biblical Roots of Apocalyptic,” in Abbas Amanat and Magnus Bernhardsson, eds., *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America*, 56–66 (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2002) 56; Murphy, *Apocalypticism*, xvii.
- 86 The quotation is from Murphy, *Apocalypticism*, 8. See also *ibid.*, 23, on the emphasis in the apocalyptic on “access to heaven and hell, parts of an integrated cosmos,” for “discovering the truth; but unaided human reason cannot do so,” resonating again with the role of the shaman in his society.
- 87 Sanders (“First Tour of Hell,” 167) refers to this dual semantic as “the apocalypses’ twin cultural roles as a literature of resistance, promising the end of the earthly powers that be, and as a tool of mystical speculation, producing visions of other worlds that flow into the later streams of Western mysticism.” On this dual implication of the apocalyptic, with the distinction not being absolute, see Murphy, *Apocalypticism*, 6. On the elimination of time, resulting in timelessness, and the creation of a new cosmos in the apocalyptic perspective, see Schmithals, *Apocalyptic Movement*, 21–24.
- 88 See above, n. 75.
- 89 *Myth of the Eternal Return*, 112–23 and 141–54. See also Bell, “Example of Luxor,” 130, on the ancient Egyptian notion of a pristine new beginning reenacted by every annual festive occasion, especially the New Year’s celebration, with the word for “year,” *mpt*, meaning literally “renewal” or “a new beginning.” The same notion is also present in the characterization of the reigns of certain kings as “rebirth (or renaissance),” “in the sense of the restoration of the originally perfect state – the immaculate world order of the time of creation – and the beginning of a new age of salvation” (*ibid.*). On the elimination of history in the apocalyptic perspective, see Schmithals, *Apocalyptic Movement*, 41.
- 90 *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: Meridian Books, 1971) 265–300.
- 91 *Ibid.*, 278. For a statement that at least certain elements of the Platonic philosophical system are of Irano-Babylonian origin, see Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return*, 120. On the interconnections in conceptions of primordial time among the Indian, Iranian, and Mesopotamian traditions, see M. L. West, *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971) 28–36. For a statement on the cultural interconnectedness of Babylonia, Iran, and India for centuries in antiquity, see Peter Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* (Point Reyes Station, CA: The Golden Sufi Center, 1999) 18. On the paradigmatic nature of the Vedic Indian notions of cyclical time and the cyclicity of “religious time” in ancient Mesopotamia, see Jean-Jacques Glassner, “Historical Times in Mesopotamia,” in Albert de Pury, Jean-Daniel Macchi, and Thomas Römer, eds., *Israel Reconstructs its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research*, 189–211 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) 189–90.
- 92 Simo Parpola, “The Construction of Dur-Šarrukin in the Assyrian Royal Correspondence,” in Annie Caubet, ed., *Khorsabad, le palais de Sargon II, roi d’Assyrie: Actes du colloque organisé au Musée du Louvre par le Service culturel les 21 et 22 janvier 1994*, 47–76 (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1995).
- 93 Winter, “Art in Empire,” 366–69.
- 94 Richard D. Barnett, Erika Bleibtreu, and Geoffrey Turner, with contributions by Dominique Collon, *Sculptures from the Southwest*

- Palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh* (London: The British Museum, 1998) pls. 96–119.
- 95 Marie-Henriette Gates, “Artisans and Art in Old Babylonian Mari,” in Gunter, ed., *Investigating Artistic Environments*, 29–37; Jack M. Sasson, “Artisans ... Artists: Documentary Perspectives from Mari,” in Gunter, ed., *Investigating Artistic Environments*, 21–27.
- 96 In this regard, see Ann C. Gunter, “Artists and Ancient Near Eastern Art,” in Gunter, ed., *Investigating Artistic Environments*, 9–17, esp. 11.
- 97 Famously, it is Naram-Sîn (2254–2218 BCE) of the Akkadian state who introduces the phenomenon, which is then taken over by Shulgi (2094–2047 BCE) of the Ur III state and his successors, and maintained by the kings of Isin after the fall of Ur. For an overview, see Piotr Michalowski, “The Mortal Kings of Ur: A Short Century of Divine Rule in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in Brisch, ed., *Religion and Power*, 33–45, esp. 34–40.
- 98 Theo van den Hout, “Tuthalija IV. und die Ikonographie hethitischer Großkönige des 13. Jhs.,” *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 3/4 (1995) 545–73; Winter, “Art in Empire,” 374 and 376; Peter Machinist, “Kingship and Divinity in Imperial Assyria,” in Gary Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis, eds., *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion*, 152–88 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2006); Root, “Defining the Divine.” For a plea for treating divine kingship solely within its specific historical, political, and ideological circumstances, see again Michalowski, “Mortal Kings,” which has both its values and limitations.
- 99 In this regard, see Jonathan Z. Smith, “Wisdom and Apocalyptic,” in Birger Pearson, ed., *Religious Syncretism in Antiquity: Essays in Conversation with Geo Widengren*, 131–56 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975) 135.
- 100 As such, see again Ataç, “‘Underworld Vision’ of the Ninevite Intellectual Milieu,” where the gist of the argument is that the vision essentially belongs to the “scholar-priest,” and the royal figure is primarily the medium of expression in its representation.
- 101 On destiny in ancient Mesopotamia, *namtar* in Sumerian and *šimtu* in Akkadian, as “subordinated to the divine will, even if, by definition, the human kings are as much its agents as its objects,” see Glassner, “Historical Times,” 190. On *šimtu*, see also Rochberg, *Heavenly Writing*, 196.
- 102 *The God Ninurta in the Mythology and Royal Ideology of Ancient Mesopotamia*, State Archives of Assyria Studies 14 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2002) 13–24.
- 103 *Ibid.*, 15–16.
- 104 In addition to the two key studies of the 1980s, James C. VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition*, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 16 (Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1984); and Helge S. Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalyptic: The Mesopotamian Background of the Enoch Figure and the Son of Man* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1988), see now Sanders, “First Tour of Hell,” which treats the Neo-Assyrian text “The Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Crown Prince” “[a]s a forerunner of the apocalyptic otherworldly journey and the visionary Tour of Hell,” seeing its heritage in the books of Enoch, the Revelation of John, and Dante’s *Inferno*; and Amar Annus, “Ninurta and the Son of Man,” in Whiting, ed., *Mythology and Mythologies*, 7–17, comparing the ancient Mesopotamian Ninurta myths and imagery with Jewish apocalyptic writings such as Daniel and Esdra; as well as Annus, “Origin of Watchers.”
- 105 *Studies in Biblical Archaeology* 8 (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958) 129–33.
- 106 *Babylon and the Old Testament*, 145.
- 107 Michael Roaf and Annette Zgoll, “Assyrian Astroglyphs: Lord Aberdeen’s Black Stone and Esarhaddon’s Prisms,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 91 (2001) 264–95.
- 108 Charles Seymour, Jr., “Introductory Essay: Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel Ceiling,” in Charles Seymour, Jr., ed., *Michelangelo: The Sistine Chapel Ceiling: Illustrations, Introductory Essay, Backgrounds and Sources, Critical Essays*, 67–97, Norton Critical Studies in Art History (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972) 80, pointing out that the basis for this statement is stylistic; Sydney J. Freedberg, “Michelangelo: The Sistine Ceiling,” in Seymour, Jr., ed., *Michelangelo*, 187–207, esp. 193.
- 109 Ross King, *Michelangelo and the Pope’s Ceiling* (New York: Walker and Company, 2003) 85; Andrew Graham-Dixon, *Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel* (New York: Skyhorse, 2009) 97. Michelangelo painted the ceiling from the entrance toward the altar, from the East to the West, respectively.

- 110 Even though other factors are pointed out by experts, such as matters of visibility from the entrance and the resemblance of the composition to a battle scene already completed by the artist, the moral and apocalyptic implications of the biblical flood are often emphasized as having had a crucial impact on Michelangelo in his overall theological vision for the frescoes. In this regard, see Charles de Tolnay, *The Art and Thought of Michelangelo*, trans. Nan Buranelli (New York: Pantheon, 1964) 60; Graham-Dixon, *Sistine Chapel*, 29–32, 97, 104–5; Ross, *Pope's Ceiling*, 85–93. On the eschatological and messianic implications of the Sistine Chapel ceiling against its contemporary theological and intellectual backdrop, see also John O'Malley, S.J., "The Theology behind Michelangelo's Ceiling," in Massimo Giacometti, ed., *The Sistine Chapel: Michelangelo Rediscovered*, 99–142 (London: Muller, Blond and White, 1986) 116–17.
- 111 Seymour, Jr., "Introductory Essay," 72–73. On Michelangelo's persuading the pope to include the prophets and sibyls, "men and women who foretold the birth of the redeemer in both the Jewish and the ancient Roman traditions," in the spandrels between the windows of the vault, rather than the first plan, which "called for figures of twelve Apostles," see John T. Paoletti and Gary M. Radke, *Art in Renaissance Italy* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1997) 343–45. For discussions of the figures of the sibyls and the prophets, including an emphasis on a revived interest in the sibylline corpus in tandem with the growing importance of classical humanism during the Renaissance, see O'Malley, S. J., "Theology," 112–16; Edgar Wind, *The Religious Symbolism of Michelangelo: The Sistine Ceiling* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 124–48; Graham-Dixon, *Sistine Chapel*, 142–43. It is noteworthy that the biblical books associated with the prophets depicted by Michelangelo, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, are designated as "proto-apocalyptic" by Murphy, *Apocalypticism*, 27–66.
- 112 *Sistine Chapel*, 72–73 and 182–83.
- 113 *Ibid.*, 179. Along these lines, see also O'Malley, S. J., "Theology," 105.
- 1 THE "INVESTITURE" PAINTING FROM MARI
- 1 On the identification of this divinity as the warrior Ishtar, with comprehensive documentation of the occurrences and development of her figural type from the Akkadian through the Old Babylonian periods, see Gudrun Colbow, *Die kriegerische Ištar: Zu den Erscheinungsformen bewaffneter Gottheiten zwischen der Mitte des 3. und der Mitte des 2. Jahrtausends*, Münchener Universitäts-Schriften Philosophische Fakultät 12, Münchener Vorderasiatische Studien 8 (Munich and Vienna: Profil, 1991) esp. 212.
- 2 The unique composition of the painting and the problems it poses for interpretation are succinctly indicated in Jean-Claude Margueron, "La peinture de l'Investiture: Rythme, mesures et composition," in Barthel Hrouda, Stephen Kroll, and Peter Z. Spanos, eds., *Von Uruk nach Tuttul: Eine Festschrift für Eva Strommenger: Studien und Aufsätze von Kollegen und Freunden*, 103–9 (Munich and Vienna: Profil, 1992).
- 3 Moortgat (*Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 84) saw these putative tassels as "imitations of a carpet fringe," which would make the painting a "painted substitute for a textile pictorial carpet." In this regard, see also Moortgat, "Teppich und Malerei zur Zeit Hammurabis: Bemerkungen zum grossen Wandgemälde aus Mari," *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 9 (1952) 92–93; Béatrice Pierre, "Décor peint à Mari et au Proche-Orient 2: Chronologie, contexte, significations," *M.A.R.I.* 5 (1987) 551–76, esp. 570–71, which indicates that this decorative treatment is unique in the art of the ancient Near East of the second millennium BCE. Before jumping to conclusions about the painting's being a substitute pictorial carpet, however, it is important to keep in mind that tassels were among the physical attributes of royalty in ancient Mesopotamia from the Akkadian period on, such as seen in the wrap-around garments of the statues of Manishtushu found in Susa, on which see, most recently, Melissa Eppihimer, "Assembling King and State: The Statues of Manishtushu and the Consolidation of Akkadian Kingship," *AJA* 114 (2010) 365–80.
- 4 On the possible Aegean connections in the "investiture" painting, especially in relation to the running spirals, see Kantor, *Aegean and the Orient*, 21–32, esp. 31; Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 126; Smith, *Interconnections*, 18 and 96. Kantor argued that the spirals reached the art of the ancient Near East and Egypt from the Aegean throughout the different phases of the second millennium

BCE. In this regard, see further Moortgat, “Teppich und Malerei,” 92; Dominique Parayre, “Les merveilleuses peintures du palais,” *Histoire et archéologie* 80 (1984) 58–63, esp. 61; and Avraham Malamat, “Mari and its Relations with the Eastern Mediterranean,” in Meir Lubteski, Claire Gottlieb, Sharon Keller, eds., *Boundaries of the Ancient Near Eastern World: A Tribute to Cyrus H. Gordon*, 411–18, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Series 273 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1998) 415–16. Noting that the occurrence of the spirals in the “investiture” painting and the decoration of the podium in Room 64 in the Mari palace is earlier than their occurrence in extant Minoan art, Béatrice Pierre posits that there is no secure ground on which to propose Aegean influence on ancient Mesopotamian painting at this point (“Décor peint à Mari et au Proche-Orient,” *M.A.R.I.* 3 [1984] 223–54, esp. 233). On the question of the originality of the Mari paintings, especially vis-à-vis the development and chronology of the art of Crete, see André Parrot, *Mission archéologique de Mari 2/2: Le palais: Peintures murales* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1958) 108–11. Concerning the ongoing debate among scholars about the issue of who influenced whom and the nature and direction of the influences as far as wall paintings from Mari and those from the Minoan culture are concerned, see Malamat, “Mari and its Relations,” 415–16; Irene J. Winter, “Thera Paintings and the Ancient Near East: The Private and Public Domains of Wall Decoration,” in Susan Sherratt, ed., *The Wall Paintings of Thera: Proceedings of the First International Symposium, Petros Nomikos Conference Center, Thera, Hellas, 30 August–4 September 1997*, vol. 11, 745–62 (Athens, 2000); and most recently Robert B. Koehl, “The Near Eastern Contribution to Aegean Wall Painting and Vice Versa,” in Joan Aruz, Sarah B. Graff, and Yelena Rakic, eds., *Cultures in Contact: From Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean in the Second Millennium B.C.*, 170–79, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Symposia (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013). On possible Minoan influence on Mari in relation to the painted *faux marbre* decoration on the podium in the throne room suite, see Barbara Niemeier and Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier, “Aegean Frescoes in

Syria-Palestine: Alalakh and Tel Kabri,” in Sherratt, ed., *Wall Paintings of Thera*, vol. 11, 763–802, esp. 772–73. For a consideration of the painted decoration at Mari altogether as part of a *koiné* of artistic tradition, of which it was the easternmost limit, see Pierre, “Décor peint 2,” 574. In “Les peintures murales de l’Euphrate à la Méditerranée: Des conceptions communes?” *Sources travaux historiques* 36–37 (1994) 49–60, the same author, writing under the name of Béatrice Muller, reiterates her earlier observations on this artistic *koiné*. She posits that the Near Eastern impact on Aegean wall painting may have characterized the era of the first palaces in Crete before ca. 1700 BCE, whereas the apogee of Aegean wall painting during the Neo-Palatial period is likely to have influenced later Middle Bronze Age and Late Bronze Age developments in sites such as Alalah, Tell Kabri, and Dur Kurigalzu (Aqar Quf). Muller regards Mari as the hub of a tradition of wall painting, possibly from the second half of the third millennium BCE onward, informing the artistic practices of other Syrian sites such as Alalah and Qatna.

- 5 André Parrot, “Les peintures du palais de Mari,” *Syria* 18 (1937) 325–54, esp. 344; Parrot, *Peintures murales*, 61. Parrot (*Peintures murales*, 60 and 107) observes that whereas the imagery of the central panel conforms closely to the hieratic vocabulary of ancient Mesopotamian art, the composition changes distinctively in the landscape scene that surrounds this focus. He associates the hieratic style with Sumerian art, as exemplified by the stelae of Ur-Namma and Gudea, and the “naturalistic” style with Akkadian experiments, especially in glyptic, in capturing the natural. According to Parrot (“Peintures du palais,” 343; *Peintures murales*, 60), it is as if the landscape scene were the work of another hand, so different is its style. On the Lama figures, see Barrelet, “Peinture de la cour 106,” 10.
- 6 Barrelet, “Peinture de la cour 106,” 9; Jean-Claude Margueron, “La peinture de l’investiture et l’histoire de la cour 106,” in Ö. Tunca, ed., *De la Babylonie à la Syrie, en passant par Mari: Mélanges offerts à Monsieur J.-R. Kupper à l’occasion de son 70^e anniversaire*, 115–25 (Liège: Université de Liège, 1990) 115.
- 7 Fallen on the bottom of the same wall were fragments belonging to a second group of wall paintings depicting a sacrificial procession,

- painted, however, on a thick white gesso, a different technique (Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 70–71). The exact spatial and chronological relation between the “investiture” painting and this second series of paintings is still not entirely clear.
- 8 “Die Wandgemälde im Palaste zu Mari und ihre historische Einordnung,” *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 3 (1964) 68–70; Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 71.
 - 9 “Wandgemälde,” 70; Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 85. On Hammurapi and his stela, see also Marc Van De Mieroop, *King Hammurabi of Babylon: A Biography* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005) 100–1.
 - 10 “Peinture de l’investiture et l’histoire,” 120–25. The current excavator of Mari is Pascal Butterlin.
 - 11 Malamat, “Mari and its Relations,” 411. According to Margueron (“Peinture de l’investiture et l’histoire,” 120–25), the fragments belonging to the second group of wall paintings depicting a sacrificial procession, fallen on the bottom of the same wall, represented the decorative program of the court when it was refurbished by Yasmah-Addu (ca. 1795–76 BCE), son of Shamshi-Adad, during the so-called Assyrian interregnum, a date already purported by Moortgat (“Wandgemälde,” 71–72; Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 72 and 84), again on the grounds of the stylistic similarities between the procession scene and the few extant examples of the art of the period of Shamshi-Adad. In Margueron’s view, the refurbishment would have left the “investiture” painting intact in its place on account of its revered antiquity and the potency of its visual statement. In her article “The Palace of Zimri-Lim at Mari,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 47 (1984) 70–87, esp. 78, Marie-Henriette Gates, however, has suggested that the “investiture” painting would have been plastered over by the procession scene. She thus asks the question: “If the ‘Investiture’ scene can be firmly linked to the iconography of Hammurabi’s thirty-third or thirty-fifth regnal year, who then commissioned the procession friezes in the Court of the Palms?” Somewhat conflicting with this view, however, is Gates’ (*ibid.*, 77) own statement in the same publication that Moortgat’s linking the garment worn by the main figure of the procession with that of Shamshi-Adad as shown on the fragmentary stela from Mardin is convincing.
 - 12 For a more detailed discussion of the history of scholarship concentrating on the dating of the Mari paintings from Court 106, see Yoko Tomabechi, “Wall-Paintings and Related Color Schemes of the Old Babylonian Mari Architectures,” *Sumer* 36 (1980) 139–50; Gates, “Palace of Zimri-Lim,” 76–78; Astrid Nunn, *Die Wandmalerei und der glasierte Wandschmuck im alten Orient* (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1988) 85–87; Margueron, “Peinture de l’investiture et l’histoire.” See further Pierre, “Décor peint,” 234, and “Décor peint 2,” which, based on an analysis of the architecture and painting techniques at Mari, concurs with Moortgat’s dating the “investiture” painting to the time of Zimri-Lim. As stated by Feldman (*Diplomacy by Design*, 8), within the debate on the chronology of the Mari paintings, the majority of the scholars involved seem to have followed Moortgat’s dating.
 - 13 For an overview of the formal and semantic characteristics of such heraldic compositions bringing together animals and “sacred” plants, see Moortgat, *Tammuz*, 3–9.
 - 14 See *Alt-vorderasiatische Malerei* (Berlin: Safari, 1959) 13–14, on the assimilation by Assyria of a great component of Hurro-Mittanian thoughts and forms; and Stein, “Winged Disks and Sacred Trees,” for a study of the symbolism of Mittanian glyptic and its foundational role in the forging of the iconography of the Assyrian Empire.
 - 15 For illustrations of examples see nos. 129–37, 191, and 196 in Donald M. Matthews, *Principles of Composition in Near Eastern Glyptic of the Later Second Millennium BCE* (Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1990).
 - 16 On Old Babylonian Mari’s being home to international artists as well as its role as entrepôt in the dissemination of goods among the contemporary ancient powers, see Jack M. Sasson, “Instances of Mobility among Mari Artisans,” *BASOR* 190 (1968) 46–54, esp. 46 and 53.
 - 17 On Mari as an influential territorial power and a hub of trade connections in the Old Babylonian period, see Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 13 and xix, the latter a map of the “world of the Mari letters,” which shows to what extent Assyria as a geographic area is encompassed in this milieu; Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East ca. 3000–323* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007 [2004]) 103–11.

- For an account of Mari history from Yahdun-Lim across the so-called Assyrian interregnum through Zimri-Lim's take-over of his ancestors' throne as a result of the disintegration of the so-called Kingdom of Northern Mesopotamia, see Dominique Charpin and Jean-Marie Durand, "La Prise du pouvoir par Zimri-Lim," *M.A.R.I.* 4 (1985) 293–343. A pithy outline of the history of Syria in the first half of the second millennium BCE is also found in Lluís Feliu, *The God Dagan in Bronze Age Syria*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson, Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 19 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2003) 63–65. See also Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 105, on the impact of the era of Shamshi-Adad and Hammurapi on the art and architecture of Assyria.
- 18 See Moortgat, *Malerei*, 12, for changes in wall painting in ancient Mesopotamia in the second half of the second millennium BCE in the art of the "new northern peoples," the Kassites, the Hurrians, and the Hittites. Moortgat points out that the paintings from Dur Kurigalzu (Aqar Quf) are not mythical-cultic or political-ideological in content; rather, they show processions. On the wall paintings of Dur Kurigalzu, see also Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 99.
- 19 Constance von Rüden, *Die Wandmalereien aus Tall Mišrife/Qatna im Kontext überregionaler Kommunikation: Mit Beiträgen von Ann Brysbaert und Ilka Weisser* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011) 64–76. The running spirals and the date palms constitute the primary common figural and ornamental elements between the Mari "investiture" painting and the remains of wall painting from Room N in the palace at Qatna. On the Aegeo-Syrian contact in wall painting, see also Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier and Barbara Niemeier, "Minoan Frescoes in the Eastern Mediterranean," in Eric H. Cline and Diane Harris-Cline, eds., *The Aegean and the Orient in the Second Millennium: Proceedings of the 50th Anniversary Symposium, Cincinnati, 18–20 April 1997*, 69–97, *Aegeum* 18 (Université de Liège: Histoire de l'art et archéologie de la Grèce antique; University of Texas at Austin: Program in Aegean Scripts and Prehistory, 1998); Koehl, "Near Eastern Contribution"; and Peter Pfälzner, "The Qatna Wall Paintings and the Formation of Aegeo-Syrian Art," in Aruz, Graff, and Rakic, eds., *Cultures in Contact*, 200–13.
- 20 For an overview of the formal and compositional principles of wall painting in ancient Mesopotamia in the second and first millennia BCE, see Moortgat, *Malerei*, esp. 12–16, where the compartmentalized characteristics of Neo-Assyrian orthostat reliefs are also likened to those of wall painting. Moortgat saw the orthostat slab technique as a fruitful medium that lent itself perfectly to this compartmentalized approach to visual representation. Moortgat adds that when the Assyrians lacked the means to utilize the costly technique of sculpture, they painted "friezes" over gypsum, as at Til Barsib, with subject matter no different from that of relief sculpture. On the affinity of Neo-Assyrian relief panels to contemporary developments in the media of painting and glazed brick panels, see also Reade, *Assyrian Sculpture*, 19–20. On thematic parallels between the Mari wall paintings and Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs, which include the hunt, battle, and tribute, see Muller, "Peintures murales," 55. A focused study of Assyrian wall painting, both in the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods, mainly in its formal aspects is Pauline Albenda, *Ornamental Wall Painting in the Art of the Assyrian Empire*, Cuneiform Monographs 28 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill and Styx, 2005).
- 21 See Walter Andrae, *Farbige Keramik aus Assur und ihre Vorstufen in altassyrischen Wandmalereien* (Berlin: Scarabaeus, 1923) pls. 2–3; and Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, Figs. 181 and 196, respectively.
- 22 J. E. Reade, "A Glazed Brick Panel from Nimrud," *Iraq* 25 (1963) 38–47; Irene J. Winter, "Ornament and the 'Rhetoric of Abundance' in Assyria," *Eretz-Israel* 27 (2003) 252–64.
- 23 See Moortgat, *Tammuz*, 129, on how the most legible manifestation of the tree surmounted by the winged disk is this particular image.
- 24 A fragmentary commemorative stela attributed to Sargon of Akkad features the goddess Ishtar with maces emanating from her shoulders, the "warrior Ishtar," even though the ring and rod are not part of this composition and the subject matter is the presentation of defeated enemies (Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, pls. 126–27). The art of Gudea features the flowing vase and the "sacred" plant growing out of it. In addition to both of these motifs, the art of Ur-Namma also depicts the ring and rod. For illustrations and discussion, see *ibid.*, 47–54, 62–74. In fact, even though Moortgat

emphatically dates the “investiture” painting to the Old Babylonian period, he treats it, along with the Room 132 paintings from the Mari palace, in his chapter on “Sumero-Akkadian Art,” under the sub-division “The Sumero-Akkadian Revival.” Moortgat (*ibid.*, 105) juxtaposes the image of Hammurapi as the “bringer of peace,” “an image developed in the Gudea period,” with that of Shamshi-Adad “as the conqueror of all evil, an image which had last been chosen by the Akkadian period as its main theme.” One would have no difficulty seeing the “investiture” painting aligned more with the former mode than the latter, despite the presence of the “warrior Ishtar.”

- 25 A study treating the specialists and their practices in the courts of Mari and the Neo-Assyrian Empire side by side is Beate Pongratz-Leisten, *Herrschaftswissen in Mesopotamien: Formen der Kommunikation zwischen Gott und König im 2. und 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, State Archives of Assyria Studies 10 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1999). It is unclear whether the substantive gap in time between the Mari and Neo-Assyrian corpora is related to matters of preservation and discovery or change in practices. In this respect, see Maria deJong Ellis, “Observations on Mesopotamian Oracles and Prophetic Texts: Literary and Historiographic Considerations,” *JCS* 41 (1989) 127–86, esp. 133 and n. 22. The same question is posed in Eckart Frahm, “Keeping Company with Men of Learning: The King as Scholar,” in Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, 508–32 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 518, where the gap or lack of documentation is seen as a matter of “the chances of discovery.” See also Izak Cornelius, “Aspects of the Iconography of the Warrior Goddess Ištar and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecies,” in Martti Nissinen and Charles E. Carter, eds., *Images and Prophecy in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean*, 15–40 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2009) 15, for the statement that the largest corpora of “prophetic” texts in the ancient Near East originate from Old Babylonian Mari and Neo-Assyrian Nineveh. In this regard, see also Pierre Villard, “Les prophéties à l’époque néo-assyrienne,” in André Lemaire, ed., *Prophètes et rois: Bible et Proche-Orient*, 55–84 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2001) 55,

where the only pieces of evidence for prophecy in ancient Mesopotamia between Old Babylonian Mari and the Neo-Assyrian king Esarhaddon are identified as a Middle Assyrian administrative text from Kar Tukulti-Ninurta and a decree of Adad-nirari III (810–783 BCE). A study that brings to the fore the contrasts between Mari and Neo-Assyrian prophecy, while believing in lessons to be drawn from studying them side by side, is Karel van der Toorn, “Mesopotamian Prophecy between Immanence and Transcendence: A Comparison of Old Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian Prophecy,” in Nissinen, ed., *Prophecy*, 71–87.

- 26 See Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 98, stating that not all prophecies would have been recorded in writing, with many reports “produced on a larger scale and later disposed of.” Nissinen, nevertheless, evaluates the evidence from the reigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal as an indication of these kings’ greater attentiveness to prophecy than their predecessors.
- 27 On techniques informing and guiding royal praxis developed in Mari in the first half of the second millennium BCE, especially prophecy, dreams, visions, and most importantly divination, see again Pongratz-Leisten, *Herrschaftswissen*, esp. 7 and 12. In addition to Pongratz-Leisten’s work, comprehensive discussions can also be found in Ellis, “Mesopotamian Oracles”; and Jean-Marie Durand, “La religion ammorite en Syrie à l’époque des archives de Mari,” in Gregorio del Olmo Lete, ed., *Mythologie et religion des sémites occidentaux* vol. 1, 161–716, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 162 (Leuven; Paris; Dudley, MA: Peeters and Department Oosterse Studies, 2008) esp. 431–546, on practices enabling contact with divinity; and 433–34, on the practice of investigating the future in eighteenth-century BCE Mari. A shorter overview may be found in Stephanie Dalley, *Mari and Karana: Two Old Babylonian Cities* (London and New York: Longman, 1984) 127–33. For translations into English of examples of prophecies addressed to Zimri-Lim of Mari, with further bibliography, see Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005) 143–46. Fifty texts from Mari, all letters identified as prophetic sources, in transliteration and translation, can be found in Nissinen, *Prophets*

and *Prophecy*, 17–77. A standard collection of the Mari prophecies, in transliteration and French translation, is J.-M. Durand, “Les textes prophétiques,” *Archives épistolaires de Mari* 1/1 (1998) 377–452; see esp. 411–12, which stresses the presence in the Old Babylonian period of a consciousness of political history as influenced or determined by the divine will. On the primarily political and military content of the Old Babylonian Mari prophecies, see Abraham Malamat, *Mari and the Bible*, Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East 12 (Leiden, Boston, MA, and Cologne: Brill, 1998) 59; Nissinen, *Prophecy and Prophecy*, 16; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 143; Dominique Charpin, “Prophètes et rois dans le Proche-Orient amorrite,” in Lemaire, ed., *Prophètes et rois*, 21–53, esp. 42–49. On the ancient Mesopotamian scholarly practice of probing the divine will for knowledge of the future and taking precautions to avoid portended evil, particularly in the first-millennium BCE Assyria and Babylonia, see Stefan Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung: Eine Untersuchung altorientalischen Denkens anhand der babylonisch-assyrischen Löserituelle (Namburbi)* (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1994).

- 28 On the ancient Mesopotamian interest in the future and making it accessible, see Benjamin R. Foster, “Mesopotamia and the End of Time,” in Amanat and Bernhardtson, eds., *Imagining the End*, 23–32, esp. 28. Further on the sense of the future in ancient Mesopotamia in the Old Babylonian period, both in terms of the immediate future investigated by divination and the questionable presence of the idea of distant future, see Dietz Otto Edzard, “La vision du passé et de l’avenir en Mésopotamie,” in *Histoire et conscience historique dans les civilisations du Proche-Orient ancien: Actes du Colloque de Cartigny 1986*, 157–66, Les Cahiers du CEPOA 5 (Leuven: Peeters, 1989) 164–66. Ellis (“Mesopotamian Oracles,” 186) posits that in ancient Mesopotamia the highest ranking and theoretically oriented diviners, whose knowledge must have exceeded that of the mere practitioner, functioned both as political scientists and theologians. On divination within the framework of ancient Mesopotamian notions of temporality, especially the historical omens of Old Babylonian Mari as indicative of “the bond that unites human history to

nature and to the cosmos,” see also Glassner, “Historical Times,” 190 and 205. Further on ancient Mesopotamian divination and its connections “with the temporal and with concepts of time,” see Ulla Susanne Koch, “Concepts and Perception of Time in Mesopotamian Divination,” in Feliu et al., *Time and History*, 127–42, where divination is seen as related to the past, present, and future alike, not in the sense of foretelling the future, but in the sense of “a guide to action” in matters that have collective significance, such as politics, war, or disease.

- 29 A few references to Enki/Ea’s realm, the Apsû, as a paragon of ritual purity from the texts of ancient Mesopotamia should suffice to demonstrate this point. Gudea’s Cylinder A (xxiv 20) refers to this domain as pure as part of a simile; translated in Dietz Otto Edzard, *Gudea and His Dynasty*, Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia 3/1 (Toronto, Buffalo, NY, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 84: “The grove(?) (of the House) he let grow on ground pure as the Abzu.” Furthermore, the Sumerian poem known as *Enki and the World Order* has Enki characterize the Abzu as follows: “I have built my house, a shrine, in a pure place, and named it with a good name” (Jeremy Black et al., *The Literature of Ancient Sumer* [Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004] 217). First millennium BCE ritual texts are particularly rich in references to purity and purification in connection with Enki/Ea and the Apsû. In the *Poem of Erra* (v. 162) Marduk asks Erra about the antediluvian sages, the *apkallus*, associates of Enki/Ea and the inhabitants of the Apsû: “Where are the seven [*ap*]kallû of the Apsû, pure *purādu* (–fishes) who, like Ea, their lord, distinguish themselves by their sapiential skill, (and who) are appointed to the cleansing of my body?” as translated in Luigi Cagni, *The Poem of Erra*, Sources from the Ancient Near East 1/3 (Malibu, CA: Undena, 1977) 34, revealing also the primeval dimensions of this kind of purity. The so-called mouth-washing ritual texts from the first millennium BCE abound in similar references to the Apsû as a locale of ritual purity. See Christopher Walker and Michael Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian Mīs Pī Ritual: Transliteration, Translation, and Commentary*, State Archives of Assyria Literary

- Texts 1 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001) 53, 54, 95, 121, and especially 111, where a passage from Section C of the “Incantation Tablet 1/2 of *Mis Pî*” not only stresses the purity of Apsû, but also distinguishes its water as the “water of life.”
- 30 In the second and first millennia BCE, the celebration of the New Year’s festival as a cultic event in Mesopotamia was designated the *akitu*. It coincided with the equinoxes, the first and seventh months of the calendar, as the year began with the spring equinox. In older sources in Sumerian, the scheduling of the cultic New Year’s festival varied within the calendar. See W. Sallaberger, “Neujahr(sfest). A. Nach sumerischen Quellen,” *RLA* 9 (1998–2001) 291–94; and B. Pongratz-Leisten, “Neujahr(sfest). B. Nach akkadischen Quellen,” *RLA* 9 (1998–2001) 294–98.
- 31 “Mouth of the Rivers,” 166–67.
- 32 On the date of the *Sumerian Flood Story* as “not earlier than Late Old Babylonian,” see M. Civil, “The Sumerian Flood Story,” chap. in W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-ḫasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, 138–72 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) 138–39. It is reasonable to assume, however, that the relevant stories would have constituted a tradition earlier than their first written attestations, even though it is unclear how the oral and written traditions may have interacted (Lambert and Millard, *Atra-ḫasis*, 8). On the *Ark Tablet*, see Irving Finkel, *The Ark before Noah: Decoding the Story of the Flood* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2014) esp. 105–10, 357–68.
- 33 George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 23.
- 34 For the Old Babylonian period as the crucial time in which multiple flood traditions associated with different centers in ancient Mesopotamia became crystallized and the “classical” narratives of the Flood were formed, see Y. S. Chen, “The Flood Motif as a Stylistic and Temporal Device in Sumerian Literary Traditions,” *JANER* 12 (2012) 158–89, esp. 160 and 185, the latter including an excellent synopsis of the primary findings of the study: traditions from Isin exalted Enlil, Ninurta, and the Isin rulers; those from Uruk(?) exalted Inanna and Dumuzi; and the tradition from Eridu exalted Enki/Ea and his protégé, the Flood Hero. It was the Flood story from Eridu that became the most popular among others; with the Flood now ceasing to be the background of the compositions and constituting the foreground of their main subject. Chen’s study has also appeared in book form: *The Primeval Flood Catastrophe: Origins and Early Development in Mesopotamian Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- 35 See George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 18, for the statement that the Flood story related in the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh* “has been recognized more exactly as a straightforward and sometimes verbatim adaptation of part of” the *Poem of Atra-ḫasis*. For the same view, see also Lambert and Millard, *Atra-ḫasis*, 11.
- 36 “Peinture de la cour 106.”
- 37 *Ibid.*, 19–35.
- 38 On this temple, see André Parrot, *Mission archéologique de Mari 1: Le temple d’Ishtar* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1956) 62; and Parrot, *Peintures murales*, 43. Parrot does not reject, however, the likelihood that like its pre-Sargonic predecessor, the plan of the temple in the era of Zimri-Lim, too, consisted of a cella and an ante-cella.
- 39 Barrelet, “Peinture de la cour 106,” 11–12 and 26; Mariana Giovino, *The Assyrian Sacred Tree: A History of Interpretations* (Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2007) 177–78. Further on the botanically unidentified trees, see Parrot, *Peintures murales*, 59. On the resemblance of the “blossoms of the upper part of the artificial trees” in the Mari painting to the Egyptian papyrus flower, see Smith, *Interconnections*, 18.
- 40 See above, [Introduction](#), n. 107.
- 41 Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 93–95 and pls. 226–28.
- 42 “‘Cérémonie de la main’ et réinvestiture,” in Parrot, ed., *Studia Mariana*, 37–40, esp. 38; Parrot, *Peintures murales*, 63–64.
- 43 Texts from Mari refer to a “Court of Palms,” which the excavator initially associated with Court 131, assuming that the large area in its midst, stripped of paving bricks, would have been planted with date palms. See André Parrot, *Mission archéologique de Mari 2/1: Le palais: Architecture* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1958) 57, which volume also contains a fold-out plan of the palace, the one most frequently reproduced in scholarly publications. According to Yasin Al-Khalesi, *Court of Palms: A Functional Interpretation of the Mari Palace*, *Bibliotheca Mesopotamica* 8 (Malibu, CA: Undena, 1978) 9, there is no

archaeological evidence either in Court 106 or Court 131 for such plantations. On the absence of secure evidence for identifying either Court 106 or 131 with the “Court of Palms,” see also Jean Margueron, *Recherches sur les palais mésopotamiens de l'Age du Bronze* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1982) 360–63. Margueron, however, considers Room 64 to be identical to the *papāhūm*, or “shrine,” known again from the textual evidence to have been connected with the “Court of Palms” (*ibid.*, 360; Al-Khalesi, *Court of Palms*, 9). Al-Khalesi (*ibid.*, 10–11), too, locates the “Court of Palms” at Court 106, but this time on account of the palm trees shown in the “investiture” painting, in addition to the absence around Court 131 of the kind of architectural units mentioned in the Mari texts to be in association with the “Court of Palms” (*ibid.*, 6–9). Al-Khalesi’s proposed connection between the date palms shown in the “investiture” painting and the designation “Court of Palms” seems eventually to have been adopted by Margueron in the overview article “Mari: A Portrait in Art of a Mesopotamian City-State,” in Jack M. Sasson, ed., *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol. II, 885–99 (New York: Charles Scribner, 1993) 892 and 889. Another clue for the identification of the “Court of Palms” has been seen in the mention in texts of a “prancing *lamassu*” (*lamassu raqidūtum*), again in association with the “Court of Palms” (Margueron, *Recherches*, 362). Pondering both the female Lama goddesses of the “investiture” painting and the mythical quadrupeds arranged in three tiers flanking its central panel as candidates for this textual designation, Al-Khalesi (*Court of Palms*, 12–23) concludes that the *lamassus* mentioned in the Mari texts would more appropriately have been sculptures or reliefs that are not extant any more. He hypothetically locates them on the façade of Room 66, which he considers to be a likely candidate for the designation “sanctuary (*papāhūm*) of the Court of the Palms.” Margueron (*Recherches*, 62) again points out that there is no evidence whatsoever for locating these putative decorative objects in the architecture of the palace. See Nunn, *Wandmalerei*, 76–77, for the statement that opinions on the location of the “Court of Palms” are so conflicting that an answer to this question is impossible.

44 “‘Cérémonie de la main’,” 38; Parrot, *Peintures murales*, 64.

45 *Court of Palms*, 37–43. Nunn (*Wandmalerei*, 81) points out that Al-Khalesi took over a proposition formerly made in Barthel Hrouda, *Vorderasien*, vol. 1 (Munich: Beck, 1971) 159; also cited in Ursula Seidl, “Babylonische und assyrische Flachbildkunst des 2. Jahrtausends v. Chr.,” in Winfried Orthmann, ed., *Der alte Orient*, Propyläen Kunstgeschichte 14, 298–309 (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1975) 303. A synthesis endorsing aspects of some of these hypotheses that propose to see the depiction of actual spatial and decorative components of the Mari palace in the painting can be found in Margueron, “Mari: A Portrait in Art,” 895–96.

46 *Wandmalerei*, 82.

47 *Ibid.*, 80. Margueron (“Peinture de l’Investiture: Rythme, mesures et composition,” 104), too, seems eventually to have distanced himself from the “pictorial imitation” model, both in relation to tapestries and to architectural or spatial suites. His most recent studies on the Mari painting, nevertheless, again prioritize a formal and compositional analysis of the work of art, relating the proportions of the painting to those of the larger architectural setting in which it is located, the courtyard and the triple throne room suite.

48 *Malerei*, 12.

49 *Ibid.*

50 *Mari: capitale fabuleuse* (Paris: Payot, 1974) 120–21.

51 “On the Wall Painting from Court 106 of the Palace of Mari,”

Orientalia Suecana 1 (1952) 51–65. See, furthermore, Dalley, *Mari and Karana*, 134–36, on the Mari painting’s potentially representing an Ishtar festival, which might have been like a New Year’s celebration, even though Mari lacked a New Year’s festival in the strict sense of the word.

52 On the connection between Ishtar and prophecy in Mari and the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the martial connotations of Ishtar both in Mari and Assyria, as well as the question whether or not the goddesses of the Mari prophecies, Annunitum and Ishtar herself, were in any way represented in the visual arts, see Cornelius, “Aspects of the Iconography of the Warrior Goddess Ištar,” 15–16 and 27–29. Acknowledging the elusive role of Ishtar in the culture of prophecy at Mari in contrast to the Neo-Assyrian Empire, Martti Nissinen,

nevertheless, sees Ishtar as the basic goddess in ancient Mesopotamian prophecy throughout the ages. He views her prominence in the Sargonid era of the Neo-Assyrian Empire as an aspect of the synthesis of Assyrian religion and imperial ideology, and her lesser status in Mari prophecy as “due to socioreligious circumstances and traditions different from those of imperial Assyria” (“The Socioreligious Role of the Neo-Assyrian Prophets,” in Nissinen, ed., *Prophecy*, 89–114, esp. 100–1). Furthermore, Nissinen (*Prophets and Prophecy*, 16) points out that the goddess Annunitum, a manifestation of Ishtar, is the second most often speaking deity in the Mari prophecies after the god Dagan.

- 53 “The Investiture Panel at Mari and Rituals of Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 4 (2012) 1–42.

2 THE ICONOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF THE MARI PAINTING

- 1 “Peinture de l’Investiture: Rythme, mesures et composition,” 107.
- 2 Studies on the meaning of the ring and rod include E. Douglas Van Buren, “The Rod and Ring,” *Archiv Orientalní* 17 (1949) 434–50; Agnès Spycket, “La baguette et l’anneau: Un symbole d’Iran et de Mésopotamie,” in Reinhard Dittmann et al., eds., *Variatio Delectat: Iran und der Westen*, 651–66 (Münster: Ugarit, 2000); Kathryn E. Slanski, “The Mesopotamian ‘Rod and Ring’: Icon of Righteous Kingship and Balance of Power between Palace and Temple,” in Harriet Crawford, ed., *Regime Change in the Ancient Near East and Egypt: From Sargon of Agade to Saddam Hussein*, 37–59, Proceedings of the British Academy 136 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2007). See also Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 104, where the symbols are understood as measuring instruments connoting justice; and *ibid.*, 112, where the rings held by the goddess on the so-called Burney Relief are again seen as measuring ropes, which “indicate the limited span of man’s life or his judgment at death.” For a view that also highlights conceptions of royal justice in the symbolism of the ring and rod, especially in relation to “numerate” notions evoked by their being measuring instruments, see Eleanor Robson, *Mathematics in Ancient Iraq: A Social History* (Princeton,

NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008) 120–23. See, furthermore, Jutta Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen und vergleichbare Felsreliefs* (Mainz am Rhein: P. von Zabern, 1982) 40; Thorkild Jacobsen, “Pictures and Pictorial Language (The Burney Relief),” in M. Mindlin, M. J. Geller, and J. E. Wansbrough, eds., *Figurative Language in the Ancient Near East*, 1–11 (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1987) 4.

- 3 The “investiture” painting is unusual in that, in addition to the goddess, the king also holds the insignia, whereas in most other representations of this conferral, only the divinity holds them, stretching them toward the king, as seen on the Stela of Urnamma and that of Hammurapi. The only other, even more anomalous, incident of a king holding the symbols, is the relief on the so-called Broken Obelisk of Ashur-bel-kala (1073–1056 BCE) from the late Middle Assyrian period (Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, pl. 252). Here, only the royal figure is shown holding the ring and rod, while the god, represented by the solar disk out of which emerges a hand holding weapons, is not visually connected with the insignia.
- 4 For a graphic illustration that shows diagonals drawn across the painting, with their point of intersection at the figure of Ishtar, see Margueron, “Peinture de l’Investiture: Rythme, mesures et composition,” pl. 46.
- 5 See, however, Ann Perkins, “Narration in Babylonian Art,” *AJA* 61 (1957) 54–62, esp. 61, where the relief on the Stela of Hammurapi is referred to as “a version as abbreviated as possible of the type of investiture scene seen in the Mari painting”; as well as Gary Beckman, “My Sun-God’: Reflections of Mesopotamian Conceptions of Kingship among the Hittites,” in A. Panaino and G. Pettinato, eds., *Ideologies as Intercultural Phenomena: Proceedings of the Third Annual Symposium of the Assyrian and Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project Held in Chicago, USA, October 27–31, 2000*, 37–43, Melammu Symposia 3 (Milan: Università di Bologna and Isiao, 2002) 40, where mention is made of the “investiture of Hammurapi” in relation to the stela.
- 6 “Peintures du palais de Mari,” 335–46, which introduces and describes the painting under the subtitle “L’investiture de roi de Mari.” A discussion of “investiture” is also absent in the final archaeological report by Parrot on the Mari paintings, *Peintures murales*. Parrot

- conjuges up briefly matters of investiture or its renewal, “re-investiture,” in “‘Cérémonie de la main’,” 37–38.
- 7 Seidl (“Flachbildkunst,” 303–4) argues that the idea of “investiture” in such representations would make sense only within the context of Parthian-Sassanian rock reliefs, without, however, explaining why. Comparing the royal figure in the Mari painting to a figural type on Old Syrian seals with an outstretched left hand while the right is raised in greeting, Seidl identifies the gesture of the Mari king as one of “worship” or “adoration.” Nunn (*Wandmalerei*, 80) sees no reason to equate the Mari scene with “investiture” either.
 - 8 J. N. Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia: Society and Economy at the Dawn of History* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) 144; Peter M. M. G. Akkermans and Glenn M. Schwarz, *The Archaeology of Syria: From Complex Hunter-Gatherers to Early Urban Societies* (ca. 16,000–300 bc), *Cambridge World Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 [2003]) 315–16.
 - 9 See the three interrelated entries in *RIA* 5 (1976–80): J. Krecher, “Insignien,” 109–114; J. Renger, “Inthronisation,” 128–36; and R. Caplice and W. Heimpel, “Investitur,” 139–44.
 - 10 Dominique Charpin, “Histoire politique du Proche-Orient amorrite (2002–1595),” chap. in Dominique Charpin, Dietz Otto Edzard, and Marten Stol, *Mesopotamien: Die altbabylonische Zeit*, 25–480, *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 160/4 (Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2004) 240, where the Mari scene is also mentioned as presumably depicting such a ceremony in a palatial context. For references to the Assyrian coronation texts from the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods, see Steven W. Holloway, *Aššur is King! Aššur is King!: Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2002) xv, citing K. F. Müller, *Das assyrische Ritual Teil 1: Texte zum assyrischen Königsritual* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1937) 8, for the Middle Assyrian text; and Alasdair Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, *State Archives of Assyria* 3 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1989) no. 11, for *Ashurbanipal’s Coronation Hymn*. A discussion of the Assyrian coronation ritual, with quotations from the Middle Assyrian text, can also be found in Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978 [1948]) 246–48.
 - 11 See especially Richard Herbert Wilkinson, “Mesopotamian Coronation and Accession Rites in the Neo-Sumerian and Early Old-Babylonian Periods c. 2100–1800 B.C.” (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1986). See, furthermore, Jacob Klein, *The Royal Hymns of Šulgi King of Ur: Man’s Quest for Immortal Frame* (Philadelphia, PA: The American Philosophical Society, 1981) esp. 38, for the relevant verses from *Šulgi P* in translation; and Annus, *Ninurta*, 21–23.
 - 12 On the lack of correspondence between insignia mentioned in texts and the visual record, especially in relation to the ring and rod, see Cooper, “Mesopotamian Historical Consciousness,” 46.
 - 13 See above, [Chapter 1, nn. 46–47](#).
 - 14 See F. A. M. Wiggermann, “Ring und Stab (Ring and rod),” *RIA* 11 (2007) 414–21, esp. 414, where it is stated that it is the “major gods” that are shown holding the ring and rod in the art of ancient Mesopotamia. The motif is attested from the Ur III period down to the Neo-Babylonian period, “with a clear peak in the first half of the second millennium BCE.” Most of the examples of the gods holding the ring and rod illustrated by Wiggermann from the Old Babylonian period are Ishtar, Shamash, and Nanna. Most of the other gods illustrated in the same study, such as Marduk and Nabu, are from the Neo-Babylonian period and shown inscribed in the winged disk. The Neo-Assyrian rock relief at Maltai is unique and anomalous in that all the members of the divine procession depicted are shown holding the ring and rod.
 - 15 See Charpin, “Histoire politique,” 238, on certain Mari texts’ making allusions to the “divinity” of their ruler. See, furthermore, Durand, “Religion ammorite,” 548–49 and 552, on the Mari king as not deified but having more than human in him and his being treated by his subjects as though he were an object of religious devotion. The latter phenomenon is pinpointed by Durand as a matter of major contrast with central and southern Mesopotamia.
 - 16 See above, [Introduction, n. 41](#).

- 17 See above, [Introduction](#), n. 41.
- 18 Erik Hornung, *Idea into Image: Essays on Ancient Egyptian Thought*, trans. Elizabeth Bredeck (New York: Timken Publishers, 1992) 139; Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, trans., David Lorton (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 2005) 75.
- 19 “Context and Authority in Early Mesopotamian Law,” in Ronald Cohen and Judith D. Toland, eds., *State Formation and Political Legitimacy*, 95–113, *Political Anthropology* 6 (New Brunswick, NJ and Oxford: Transaction, 1988) 106. On connections between judgment and the celestial sphere, especially the stars as “divine judges” in ancient Mesopotamian texts, see Rochberg, *Heavenly Writing*, 195.
- 20 On the theme of rebirth as central to ceremonies of coronation, the rejuvenation of the royal *ka*, and the *sed* festival in ancient Egypt, see Naydler, *Shamanic Wisdom*, 192.
- 21 Especially relevant is Cylinder A (I 17–29), in which the form of the temple is revealed to Gudea by the god Ningirsu in a dream vision (Edzard, *Gudea and His Dynasty*, 69).
- 22 For instance, Gudea’s Cylinder A contains the following images: “He (thus) loyally built the House of his master, the faithful shepherd Gudea made it grow as big as heaven and earth, / He made it wear a tiara (shaped) like the new moon and he made its name appear brilliantly as far as the highlands. / Gudea made the House of Ningirsu come out like the sun from the clouds. / He made it grow like a mountain range of lapis lazuli, let it stand to be admired like a mountain range of white alabaster” (xxiv 8–17; Edzard, *Gudea and His Dynasty*, 84). On the phrase “heavenly writing” (*šīṭir šamē* or *šīṭirti šamāmi*) as a poetic metaphor used in Babylonian royal inscriptions in reference to temples “made beautiful ‘like the stars’ (*kima šīṭir šamē*, literally, ‘like the heavenly writing’),” see Rochberg, *Heavenly Writing*, 1. See also Foster, *Before the Muses*, 140–41, for an inscription of Samsuiluna (ca. 1749–1712 BCE), son and successor of Hammurapi, in which the building of Kish and its fortification wall to “unprecedented height” is presented as an ultimate goal. See below, [Chapter 6](#), for a discussion of the Neo-Assyrian capital Nineveh as a celestial foundation. On the celestial prototype of the temple as a wider religious phenomenon, see Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return*, 7–8. On the prototype of the ancient Mesopotamian temple as emphatically heavenly, see also Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001 [1993]) 36–37. A study of the building accounts of the Assyrian kings from Shalim-ahum, from the beginning of the twentieth century BCE to Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 BCE) and the king’s image as builder is Sylvie Lackenbacher, *Le roi bâtisseur: Les récits de construction assyriens des origines à Téglatphalasar III* (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1982).
- 23 In this respect, the composition of the “investiture” painting is also paralleled by the wall painting in Room 132 of the Mari palace, considered on stylistic grounds by Moortgat (“Wandgemälde,” 72–74; *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 73) to be contemporary with the Ur III period, a date on which Margueron (“Peinture de l’investiture et l’histoire,” 117) is also in agreement. For views that do not find this date convincing and suggest for the painting a much later one, contemporary with Yahdun-Lim or Yasmah-Addu, see Tomabechi, “Wall Paintings and Related Color Schemes,” 141–42; and A. Spycket, “Malerei,” *RLA* 7 (1987–90) 287–300, esp. 293.
- 24 A symbolism addressing simultaneously the stages of the soul’s purification and the hierarchic structure of the cosmos is proposed by de Tolnay (*Art and Thought*, 39) for Michelangelo’s design of the tomb of Julius II.
- 25 Parrot, *Peintures murales*, 53–54.
- 26 In her brief discussion of color symbolism in the media of painting and glazed tiles in the ancient Near East, Nunn (*Wandmalerei*, 238–41) posits that each color would have been associated with a concept in the ancient Near East, even though these concepts elude us today. It is probable that ziggurats in the ancient Near East featured different colors on their different levels, especially blue and green when glazed, perhaps corresponding to different celestial bodies or hierarchies of the cosmos (*ibid.*, 235–37). In this regard, see also Winter, “Reading Concepts of Space,” 58.
- 27 9–10. On the Apsû in ancient Mesopotamian cosmology, see Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998) 334–47. Specifically on the association of fish with the Apsû, see *ibid.*, 335.

- 28 “Mouth of the Rivers,” 173–74, citing the inscriptions and imagery of Gudea.
- 29 *Flowing Vase*, 3 and 9.
- 30 Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 66, pointing out that the motif is originally from “Old Akkad,” with the art of Gudea featuring its imaginative use; Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 90 and 99.
- 31 “Le bassin sculpté du palais de Tello et le symbole chaldéen du vase jaillissant,” *Les origines orientales de l’art* (Paris, 1891–1915) 149–71, esp. 169–70.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 See above, Chapter 1, n. 50. See also again Heuzey, “Bassin sculpté,” 157, where the vase is referred to as the “holy grail” of the “Chaldaean era.” See, furthermore, Delumeau, *History of Paradise*, 40, referring to Flavius Josephus (d. ca. 100 CE) “at the beginning of our own era,” who states “it is certain that the principal rivers of the world flow out of the earthly paradise” (*The Antiquities of the Jews* 1.1 [38–39]); and Delumeau, *History of Paradise*, 44, on the medieval Judeo-Christian perspectives that see the “earthly paradise” as “beyond human reach, either because it sits on an inaccessible height or because it is located beyond an impassable ocean. But it is not therefore unconnected with our earth. It supplies the earth with water (some authors regarding it as the source of the ocean, others as the real though mysterious origin of the great rivers that make life possible in our inhabited world).”
- 34 “Bassin sculpté,” 169–70.
- 35 “Mouth of the Rivers,” 174–75 and 188.
- 36 *King and the Tree of Life*, 11. However, in “Dilmun, the Land of the Living,” *BASOR* 96 (1944) 18–28, esp. 27–28, Samuel Noah Kramer, eager as he is to ascribe the two designations to two actual geographic locales, disagrees, matching the “mouth of the rivers” with Elam and “mouth of the two rivers” with Dilmun and the Persian Gulf, where the Euphrates and Tigris empty into the sea. See also Douglas Van Buren, *Flowing Vase*, 3, for an overview of scholarly perceptions of the streams of the flowing vase as the Euphrates and the Tigris or the four rivers of the terrestrial paradise.
- 37 For illustrations, see Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, pl. 243; Gordon Loud and Charles B. Altman, *Khorsabad Part 2: The Citadel and the Town*, The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications 40 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1938) pls. 45 and 47, respectively.
- 38 See again Albright, “Mouth of the Rivers,” 188, on the shared Egyptian and Babylonian notion of the “four great rivers, flowing from a common source to water the four quarters.” For a discussion of the royal titles “King of the Four Quarters” and “King of Sumer and Akkad” in relation to Neo-Sumerian visual imagery, see Mehmet-Ali Ataç, “King of Sumer and Akkad, King of Ur: Figural Types, Astral Symbols, and Royal Titles in the Neo-Sumerian Period,” in Robert D. Biggs, Jennie Myers, and Martha T. Roth, eds., *Proceedings of the 51st Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale Held at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, July 18–22, 2005*, 233–46, *Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization* 62 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2008).
- 39 See, however, Bradshaw and Head, “Investiture Panel,” 30, for an exception, in which Gudea’s flowing vase is seen as a symbol of “rebirth and transformation.”
- 40 For a critique of seeing matters about the goddess Ishtar all too readily as related to fertility, see Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XVIII. In the Neo-Assyrian period, Ishtar was identified with the goddess Mullissu, a personification of conceptions of ritual purity, on which see *ibid.*, XV. On the etymology of the name Mullissu, derived from Mulliltum, “the purifier,” an epithet of the goddess Ninlil, see Barbara Nevling Porter, “Ishtar of Nineveh and her Collaborator, Ishtar of Arbela, in the Reign of Ashurbanipal,” *Iraq* 66: *Nineveh: Papers of the 49th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Part 1* (2004) 41–44, esp. 42. The cone-shaped object held by the winged *apkallu* figures of the Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs is also called *mullilu*, purifier (F. A. M. Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts* [Groningen: STYX, 1992] 14–15 and 67). On the idea of perpetuity as expressed by the depictions on the basin of Gudea, see also Heuzey, “Bassin sculpté,” 171.
- 41 159–66.
- 42 *Flowing Vase*, 69.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 71.
- 44 “Iconography of Sagittarius,” 5. See also Uno Holmberg, *Der Baum des Lebens* (Helsingfors, 1922) 62–63, on the link between paradise, the

tree, and the water of life in ancient India and Mesopotamia.

45 *Flowing Vase*, 1.

46 For illustrations, see Matthews, *Principles of Composition*, nos. 129–37.

47 “I will disclose, Gilgameš, a secret matter, / and [I will] tell you a mystery of [the gods.] / It is a plant, its [appearance] is like box-thorn, / its thorn is like the *dog-rose*’s, it will [prick your hands.] / If you can gain possession of that plant, / [.....] / When Gilgameš heard this, / he opened a [channel] / Heavy stones he tied [on his feet,] / they dragged him down to the Apsû [...] / He, he took the plant and pulled [it up] / he cut loose the heavy stones [from his feet.] / The sea cast him up on its shore” (XI 281–93; George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 720–21); “Gilgameš spoke to him, to Ur-šanabi the boatman: / ‘Ur-šanabi, this plant is the “plant of heartbeat”, by which means a man can recapture his vitality. / I will take it to Uruk the Sheepfold, / I will feed some to an old man and put the plant to the test. / Its (or his) name will be “The Old Man Has Grown Young”, / I will eat some myself and go back to how I was in my youth!’” (XI 294–300; George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 722–23). On the affinity between the location of Utnapishtim and the Apsû, see most recently Woods, “At the Edge of the World,” 200 and 212.

48 See, respectively, “Mouth of the Rivers”; *King and the Tree of Life*, esp. 5–41; “Iconography of the Sagittarius,” esp. 5–7.

49 “Dilmun,” where the phrases “Abode of the Blessed” and “Elysium” are used; cited in Widengren, *King and the Tree of Life*, 45: “That the forest of cedars, the ‘cedar-mountain,’ is the garden of paradise, situated in Apsû as has been argued by Kramer, cannot possibly be disputed.” On the “Elysian” dimensions and geographic location of Dilmun, see also E. O. James, *The Tree of Life: An Archaeological Study*, Studies in the History of Religions 11 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966) 69–71. For a different view, namely that there was no notion of paradise as such in ancient Mesopotamia, but that rather there was the conception of an “Urzeit,” characterized by favorable conditions absent in the present world order, see M. P. Streck, “Paradies,” *RLA* 10 (2004) 332–34. Along similar lines, see Bendt Alster, “Dilmun, Bahrain, and the Alleged Paradise in Sumerian Myth and Literature,” in

Daniel T. Potts, ed., *Dilmun: New Studies in the Archaeology and Early History of Bahrain*, 39–74 (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1983) 57–58, quoting a passage from *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*, depicting a “golden age,” understood by Alster as made possible by “ideal kingship.” Even stricter in its skepticism of paradisiac notions in Sumerian literature is Brigitte Lion, “Âges d’or et paradis perdus dans la littérature sumérienne,” in Pirenne-Delforge and Tunca, eds., *Représentations du temps*, 55–73, where descriptions of “Urzeit” are viewed as expressing inferiority to a “civilized” world characterized by “organization” or “order.” In the ancient Mesopotamian sense, by paradise one need not understand an “original happy state in the beginning of the creation of mankind” (Alster, “Dilmun,” 55), but rather an ordinarily inaccessible pristine domain on earth that offers possibilities of immortalization and longevity, the chief exemplar for which is found in the classical Flood stories.

50 *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 267. See further *ibid.*, 279, 283, 286, on both the tree and the “full vase” as symbols of the “universe in endless regeneration” and “life without death.”

51 Along similar lines, Winter (“Rhetoric of Abundance,” 256) read the concentric bands of the glazed brick panel composition of Shalmaneser III from Fort Shalmaneser at Nimrud as “the extended universe issuing forth from the center,” even though her metaphorical model, too, is the political center of the Assyrian Empire and its king as the provider of agrarian abundance in the land.

52 See especially Giovino, *Interpretations*, which provides the most thorough overview of the older scholarship especially on the question of the “sacred tree” mainly from a historiographic perspective.

53 See Wilfred George Lambert, “The Pantheon of Mari,” *M.A.R.I.* 4 (1985) 525–39, esp. 535–38; and Durand, “Religion ammorite,” 222–23, on Ea; and 256–59, on Ishtar.

54 Al-Khalesi, *Court of Palms*, 60–61. Durand (“Religion ammorite,” 256) indicates that nothing is known more specifically about this goddess. On Itur-mer, see Lambert, “Pantheon,” 533–35; Durand, “Religion ammorite,” 189–94. On the interrelationship between Enlil and Inanna in the bestowal of insignia of kingship in the first half of the second millennium BCE, see Joan Goodnick Westenholz, “King by Love of

- Inanna: An Image of Female Empowerment?" *NIN 1* (2000) 75–89, esp. 79–80, where it is observed that Enlil of Nippur took over from Inanna of Uruk the right to confer kingship during the third millennium BCE, without fully eliminating, however, the traces of Inanna's bestowal of kingship in the second millennium BCE states of Babylonia.
- 55 Bertrand Lafont, "Sacrifices et rituels à Mari et dans la Bible," *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie orientale* 93 (1999) 57–77, esp. 67–69; Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 80. The basic study on the Mari ritual calendar is Jack M. Sasson, "The Calendar and Festivals of Mari during the Reign of Zimri-Lim," in Marvin A. Powell Jr. and Ronald H. Sack, eds., *Studies in Honor of Töm B. Jones*, 119–41, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 203 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Butzon and Kevelaer, 1979) esp. 132–33, on the Ishtar festival, mentioning the "entrance" of Ištar into the palace." On this Ishtar festival and its potential relevance to the scene depicted in the Mari painting, see also Dalley, *Mari and Karana*, 134–36.
- 56 Lafont, "Sacrifices," 67–69.
- 57 Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 80 and text no. 51, "Ritual of Ištar, Text 2."
- 58 On Inanna/Ishtar as a celestial deity associated with Venus, and the etymology of the name Inanna as "lady of heaven," see Claus Wilcke, "Inanna/Ištar A. Philologisch," *RLA* 5 (1976–80) 74–87, esp. 75, where the genitival construction nin-an-ak, "Lady of Heaven," is cited as the *communis opinio* by Tzvi Abusch, "Inanna/Ishtar," in Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 452–56 (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1995) 452. On Inanna/Ishtar as the "Lady of Heaven" or the "Queen of Heaven," see also Gebhard J. Selz, "Five Divine Ladies: Thoughts on Inana(k), Ištar, In(n)in(a), Annunītum, and Anat, and the Origin of the Title 'Queen of Heaven,'" *NIN 1* (2000) 29–62, esp. 29–30; and Francesca Rochberg, "The Heavens and the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia," in Pongratz-Leisten, ed., *Revolutionary Monotheism*, 117–36, esp. 118, which also stresses that the astral aspect of Inanna as the morning star and evening star goes back to the Late Uruk period. Ishtar is also called "lady of heaven" in the Amarna letter no. 23, from the Mittanian king Tushratta (ca. 1380–1340 BCE) to Amenhotep III (Dynasty 18, ca. 1390–1352 BCE). According to W. G. Lambert, "Ištar of Nineveh," *Iraq* 66: *Nineveh: Papers of the 49th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Part 1* (2004) 35–39, esp. 35, the epithet "lady of heaven" might allude to her as the star Venus, "but it might also mean the abode of the good gods without any astral allusion."
- 59 "Peinture de la cour 106," 22.
- 60 "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs," *Simiolus* 6 (1972–73) 9–19, esp. 12.
- 61 *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (New York: Phaidon, 2003) 381–82.
- 62 For studies on these books, see especially Erik Hornung, *The Valley of the Kings: Horizon of Eternity*, trans. David Warburton (New York: Timken, 1990); Hornung, *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Netherworld*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1999); Theodor Abt and Erik Hornung, *Knowledge for the Afterlife: The Egyptian Amduat – A Quest for Immortality* (Zurich: Living Human Heritage, 2003); Ina Hegenbarth-Reichardt, "Von Zeiten und Räumen oder: Wie unendlich ist die altägyptische Ewigkeit?" in Barton et al., eds., *Zeit und Ewigkeit*, 3–28; and Andreas Schweizer, *The Sungod's Journey through the Netherworld: Reading the Ancient Egyptian Amduat*, ed. David Lorton (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2010), a study of this material from a Jungian psycho-analytical perspective.
- 63 The oldest extant fragments of the *Amduat* are from the tomb of Thutmose I (Dynasty 18, 1504–1492 BCE), although they might belong to the early years of Hatshepsut (Dynasty 18, 1473–1458 BCE). The earliest complete rendition of the book comes from the tomb of Thutmose III (1479–1425 BCE). The book, in principle, however, may date earlier than the New Kingdom. As for the *Book of Gates*, its oldest extant occurrence is in the tomb of Horemheb (Dynasty 18, 1323–1295 BCE). Both books have a formal distinction from their later counterparts in that they feature the solar bark traveling through the twelve hours of the night. On the dates and attestations of the *Amduat* and the *Book of Gates* inside the royal tombs, see Hornung, *Books of the Netherworld*, 26–31 and 55–57, respectively. See also Baines, "Presenting and Discussing Deities," 71, n. 68, citing literature arguing for an earlier, Middle

Kingdom, date for the visual representations of the ancient Egyptian netherworld.

- 64 Ishtar may also be present in a literary account of ascent to heaven. What in great likelihood is a shrine of the goddess is mentioned in the *Etana Epic*, the paradigmatic textual depiction of an ascent to heaven from ancient Mesopotamia and a literary tradition in Akkadian that goes back to the Old Babylonian period. In Etana's initial dream prefiguring his ascent to heaven, he and the eagle, his companion and medium of ascent, enter a shrine and come face to face with a divine presence characterized by a throne of lions in the uppermost heaven, the heaven of Anu. Because of the close association of the lion with Ishtar and the celestial locale of this encounter, this throne is often understood as belonging to the goddess (Kinnier Wilson, *Legend of Etana*, 10; Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 50–60, esp. 58). “Etana [sp]oke [to the eagle saying:] / ‘My fri[end] this god show[ed] (me) a dream] / We passed through the entrance of the Gate of Anu, Enli[l and] E[a.] / We bowed down [together, m]e and yo[u.] / We passed through the entrance of the Gate of Sin, Shamash, Adad, and Ištar. / [We bowed down together] me and yo[u.] / I saw a house [which had n]o window, the seal [...] / Pushing in the door, I went inside. / A single [...] was sitting inside. / Magnificent with a tiara, her entire [count]enance [...] / A throne was set up, ... [s]ubmitted themselves.] / Beneath the throne li[ons] la[y] do[wn.] / When I rose up, the lions [...] / Then I woke up, began to tremb[le...]’ The eagle spoke to Etana [saying] / ‘My friend, clear are the. [...] / Come let me lift you to the heaven [...] / On my chest place [your chest.] / On my wing feathers place [your hand.] / On my side place [your side.]” (Section A 1–20; Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 51–53).
- 65 On both the *sed* and *akitu* festivals as rites of renewal in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, see Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 79–88 and 313–33, respectively.
- 66 Durand, “Religion ammorite,” 342; Dalley, *Mari and Karana*, 134–36.
- 67 This aspect of Inanna/Ishtar is clear especially in her role in the “sacred marriage.” In this regard, see the two classic studies, Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 295–99; and Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven, CT

and London: Yale University Press, 1976) 36–37, especially in relation to the annual cycle of the date palm growth. See, as well, Moortgat, *Tammuz*, 30, where it is stated that Inanna as the principle of life is the chief indicator of the Sumerian belief in a cycle of life and death. Moortgat also sees the first-millennium BCE divine principle Marduk–Ashur in Assyria as the descendant of Tammuz within the context of the New Year's festival. See further *ibid.*, 82, where Inanna is understood as the goddess of eternal life and renewal of life after death; and the “sacred marriage” is referred to as the “mystical union between man and god.” From a technical standpoint, on Inanna and Ishtar as two independent deities, the former Sumerian and the latter Semitic, who, by virtue of their diverse but identical qualities were merged as early as the Old Akkadian period in ancient Mesopotamian history, see Abusch, “Inanna/Ishtar,” 452 and 453–54; and Selz, “Five Divine Ladies,” 29. It is fair to consider a common divine force behind both goddesses, as attested also by the tendency in scholarship to refer to this force as Inanna/Ishtar. Crucial in this regard is also the element of “love” embedded in the royal initiation under the aegis of Inanna/Ishtar as aptly stressed by Westenholz, “King by Love of Inanna,” esp. 82.

- 68 For a summary of the ritual procedures the king went through in the celebration of the *akitu* festival in Babylon during the first millennium BCE, including the critical point of renewal in the form of the king's going through the “re-investiture” inside the shrine of Marduk and his “positive” exit thence, see Beate Pongratz-Leisten, Ina šulmi īrub: *Die kulttopographische und ideologische Programmatik der akītu-Prozession in Babylonien und Assyrien im I. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1994) 106–7. On the secluded rites of the *Opet* festival excluding the public and their setting within the inner shrines of the Luxor Temple, see Bell, “New Kingdom ‘Divine’ Temple,” 172–76.
- 69 On the necessity of a securely shielded and protected “sealed space,” such as the netherworld, as the locale for the mysteries of renewal, and hence the Hermetic vessel (*vas Hermetis*) of medieval alchemy, see Schweizer, *Sungod's Journey*, 26–27.

- 70 “Peinture de l’Investiture: Rythme, mesures et composition,” 109.
- 71 *Ibid.*, 104.
- 72 *Ibid.*, 104 and 107.
- 73 The poor state of preservation of the lateral panels prevents one from determining whether this is a natural bull, or as Barrelet (“Peinture de la cour 106,” 15) and Parrot (*Peintures murales*, 59) considered likely, a bearded human-headed divine bull.
- 74 For a list of the possible meanings of the word *kur*, see Edmund I. Gordon, “The Meaning of the Ideogram ^dKASKAL. KUR = ‘Underground Water Course’ and its Significance for Bronze Age Historical Geography,” *JCS* 21 (1967) 70–88, esp. 75–76.
- 75 On the question of the species of this bird in the scholarship on the Mari painting, the only reference known to me is Al-Khalesi, *Court of Palms*, 11, which indicates that the bird has been identified as the “hunter of Africa,” citing Parrot, *Peintures murales*, 60–61 and n. 1.
- 76 R. T. Rundle Clark, “The Origin of the Phoenix: A Study in Egyptian Religious Symbolism: Part 1: The Old Empire,” *University of Birmingham Historical Journal* 2/1 (1949) 1–29; Rundle Clark, “The Origin of the Phoenix: Part 2: Middle Empire Developments,” *University of Birmingham Historical Journal* 2/2 (1950) 105–40; László Kákósy, “Phönix,” *LÁ* 4 (1982) 1030–40. The summary that follows synthesizes the main elements of both studies.
- 77 Rundle Clark, “Origin of the Phoenix 1,” 8, 10, 17–18, 22; especially 10, where it is stated that “[t]he bird is therefore a bringer of the New Year and the promise of its fruitfulness. Quite clearly the heron is therefore a harbinger of good tidings. It is also the sign that the time of the terrible monsters of the flood waters is over.” In this regard, see again also Rundle Clark, “Origin of the Phoenix 2,” 133–34; Kákósy, “Phönix,” 1033.
- 78 Rundle Clark, “Origin of the Phoenix 1,” 1–9. See also Kákósy, “Phönix,” 1031, on the bird’s falcon-headed anthropomorphic manifestation at Medinet Habu.
- 79 Rundle Clark, “Origin of the Phoenix 2,” 106–8.
- 80 “Origin of the Phoenix 2,” 135. On the impact of the ancient Egyptian Horus falcon on the bird imagery of Middle Bronze Age Minoan Crete, see Ray Porter, “Insights into Egyptian Horus Falcon Imagery by Way of Real Falcons and Horus Falcon Influence in the Aegean in the Middle Bronze Age: Part II,” *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 3 (2011) 39–52.
- 81 See again Rundle Clark, “Origin of the Phoenix 2,” 114, on the bird’s binding together all ages of the universe, not only the micro-cosmic fate of the individual soul, but also the macro-cosmic events of mythical history. See also *ibid.*, 133, on the bird’s “angelic” role in “announcing stellar events or dates, and by extension, the fate of mankind.”
- 82 XI 148–56; George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 517–18 and 712–13.
- 83 Eliade, *Shamanism*, 156–57. See also Naydler, *Shamanic Wisdom*, 258, on the shaman’s ascent to the sky in the form of “climbing a ladder or stairway and flying up as a bird”; and *ibid.* 270, on shamanic ascent to the sky in the form of a bird in relation to Unas’ flying up to the sky as a falcon. On the image of the sky ladder or stairway and its implications for the transition from an ordinary human consciousness to the spirit world, see again *ibid.*, 273. On the ladder in the *Pyramid Texts* not simply as a means of ascent away from the earth but also as a connection between the earth and heaven, see *ibid.*, 274. In this regard, see also Rundle Clark, “Origin of the Phoenix 1,” 6–7.
- 84 Rundle Clark, “Origin of the Phoenix 1,” 9.
- 85 See Moortgat, *Wandmalerei*, 12, on how in addition to the fresco technique, aspects of naturalism in style and composition, which are foreign to the art of the ancient Near East, are matters that evoke questions of connection between the Aegean and the Near East in the study of ancient Mesopotamian painting. See, however, Winter, “Thera Paintings and the Ancient Near East,” 752, on the Mari bird as stiff in comparison to the exuberance of Aegean depictions of birds.
- 86 Parrot, *Peintures murales*, 60 and n. 2. With all its figural and ornamental elements, the Mari painting landscape and its outer frame have a strong affinity to the corpus of Neo-Assyrian examples of painting and glazed tiles dealt with in Winter, “Rhetoric of Abundance,” 252–64, especially the glazed brick panel of Shalmaneser III from Room T3 of Fort Shalmaneser at Nimrud, already mentioned in [Chapter 1](#), which features the royal figure, bands of the guilloche pattern, and other vegetal elements. What are often understood as tassels

- in the frame of the Mari painting are actually very much like the so-called mountain-scale pattern of ancient Mesopotamian ornamental imagery. This pattern appears on the bottom of Shalmaneser's glazed brick panel.
- 87 "Peinture de la cour 106," 22.
- 88 See, for instance, Heinrich Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian Art*, ed. Emma Brunner-Traut; trans. and ed. John Baines (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1986 [1919]) 247–48, even though the examples illustrated and discussed are depictions of ponds surrounded by trees, rather than those of gardens surrounded by streams.
- 89 See Sydney H. Aufrère, "The Egyptian Temple, Substitute for the Mineral Universe," in W. V. Davies, ed., *Colour and Painting in Ancient Egypt*, 158–63 (London: The British Museum, 2001) 158, for the statement that each color represented special notions and values in ancient Egyptian art, in accordance with a conception of "divine beauty."
- 90 On the three layers of the Babylonian heaven, especially as expressed in KAR 307, a religious explanatory text in the Neo-Assyrian script from Assur, and AO 8196, a late astrological-astronomical tablet, see Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 3–14.
- 91 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 92 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 93 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 94 *Ibid.*, 4. On the association of the color blue with lapis lazuli in ancient Egyptian art as well, see John H. Taylor, "Patterns of Colouring on Ancient Egyptian Coffins from the New Kingdom to the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty: An Overview," in Davies, ed., *Colour and Painting*, 164–81, esp. 167.
- 95 *Iconography of Pristine Statehood*, 43.
- 96 *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, vii.
- 97 See Kinnier Wilson, *Legend of Etana*, 8, for the relevant passage from the Middle Assyrian version of the epic. In both the *Etana Epic* and the Sultantepe version of *Nergal and Ereshkigal* from the eighth century BCE, the entrance to the Upper Heaven is called the "Gate of Anu, Enlil, and Ea." "In the Sultantepe version of *Nergal and Ereshkigal*, Nergal, Kakka (the vizier of Anu) and Namtar (the vizier of Ereshkigal) travel along the *simmelat šamāmī* [stairway of heaven], which leads from the outer gate of the underworld to the Gate of Anu, Enlil, and Ea at the entrance to the heavens" (Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 66). Horowitz (*ibid.*, 66) indicates that "[i]t is not clear from *Nergal and Ereshkigal* if the *simmelat šamāmī* is a ladder, such as the traditional view of Jacob's ladder in *Genesis* 28: 12, or an inclined stairway, such as those found on ziggurat temples, since *simmettu* has both meanings." See also Eliade, *Shamanism*, 492, on myths of ascent as referring either to the primordial *illud tempus* or to "celestial ascent performed by a hero or a sorcerer or sovereign after communication was broken off; in other words, they imply the possibility, for certain privileged or elect persons, of returning to the origin of time, of recovering the mythical and paradisaic moment before the 'fall', that is, before the break in communications between heaven and earth." Both Etana and Adapa may be seen within this framework of a possibility of return or recovery.
- 98 Woods, "At the Edge of the World," 188.
- 99 See, for instance, *Unis* 211 and *Pepi I* 512 in James P. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005) 57 and 180, respectively.
- 100 See, for instance, *Unis* 208, *Unis* 210, and *Pepi I* 544; Allen, *Pyramid Texts*, 56, 57, and 191, respectively. In this regard, see also J. H. Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (New York and Evanston, IL: Harper and Torch, 1959 [1912]) 149–53, referring to "the anomalous ascent of Osiris to the sky," and noting the "Osirianization of the ladder episode."
- 101 Margaret Cool Root, "Circles of Artistic Programming: Strategies for Studying Creative Process at Persepolis," in Gunter, ed., *Investigating Artistic Environments*, 115–39, esp. 118, citing Erik Hornung, *Das Grab des Haremhab im Tal der Könige* (Bern: Francke, 1971) Fig. 41, for an illustration.
- 102 Parrot identified the Mari "Haute Terrace" from the *shakkanakku* period, contemporary with the Ur III period in Mesopotamia, as a ziggurat, but Jean-Cl. Margueron, in *Mari: Métropole de l'Euphrate: au III^e et au début du II^e millénaire av. J.-C.* (Paris: Éditions A. et J. Picard, 2004) 384, disagrees, pointing out that Syria as a region did not have ziggurats with multiple levels in the classic Mesopotamian sense of the word, and instead featured high terraces.
- 103 Contrary to the common view (e.g., Winter, "Reading Concepts of Space," 58), Herodotus'

description of Babylon (*Histories* 1.181) and its temples does not include any statement about their color schemes. As far as the temple tower, or ziggurat, of Babylon, is concerned, Herodotus' account concentrates on its architectural layout of superimposed levels.

3 THE FLOOD MYTH AS PARADIGM

- 1 Trans. Alf Hiltebeitel (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970) xv.
- 2 For a plot of the Babylonian Story of the Flood, see Lambert and Millard, *Atra-ḫašis*, 8–13.
- 3 Pointing out a continuum in the literary theme of the flood from the third into the second millennium BCE, Chen ("Flood Motif," 175–76) sees the *Poem of Atra-ḫašis* and the *Sumerian Flood Story* as the peak of "the literary growth of the Flood," which later converges with the Gilgamesh tradition, "a process which started in the Old Babylonian period, culminated in the Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh epic probably from the Middle Babylonian period, and still lingered in the Late-Babylonian/Achaemenid copy of the *Atra-ḫašis* epic."
- 4 See Jack M. Sasson, "Mari Historiography and the Yakhdu-Lim Disc Inscription," in Tzvi Abusch, John Huehnergard, and Piotr Steinkeller, eds., *Lingering over Words: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran*, 440–53 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1990) esp. 440, lamenting the dearth of literary and theological/mythological texts in the extant Mari textual corpus. One such text, the *Epic of Zimri-Lim*, has recently been published: M. Guichard, *L'épopée de Zimri-Lim*, *Florilegium Marianum* 14, *Mémoires de NABU* 16 (Paris: SEPOA, 2014).
- 5 *Nimurta*, 131–32.
- 6 *Ibid.* In this regard, see also Steven W. Holloway, "What Ship Goes There: The Flood Narratives in the Gilgamesh Epic and Genesis Considered in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Temple Ideology," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 103 (1991) 328–55, esp. 345.
- 7 *Ark Before Noah*, 91–98.
- 8 Civil, "Sumerian Flood Story," 142–43.
- 9 George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 152.
- 10 Jacobsen, *Sumerian King List*, 74–77.
- 11 See also below, n. 50.
- 12 As is well known, certain kings in ancient Mesopotamian history, especially Shulgi (2094–2047 BCE), Lipit-Ishtar (1934–1924 BCE), and Ashurbanipal, more emphatically claimed literacy and scholarly, even antediluvian, wisdom than did others. Such a highlighted claim may certainly have been generated as much by the actual qualities of these kings as by ideology. In this regard, see Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, 167–71.
- 13 Lambert and Millard, *Atra-ḫašis*, 89.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 *Ibid.*, 91.
- 16 The lack of the mention of the roof in the *Ark Tablet* leads Finkel (*Ark Before Noah*, 179) to the conclusion that this statement was not integral to every Old Babylonian account of the Flood story.
- 17 George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 701.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 704–7.
- 19 Civil, "Sumerian Flood Story," 145.
- 20 George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 717.
- 21 Delumeau, *History of Paradise*, 23. On the transitional or intermediate state of paradise within an eschatological scheme in historical Jewish and Christian lore, see further *ibid.*, 25–41. On the affinity between the ancient Mesopotamian Flood hero and Enoch, see below, [Chapter 5](#).
- 22 Delumeau, *History of Paradise*, 23.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 *Ibid.*, 32.
- 25 See Wayne Horowitz and Philip J. Watson, "Further Notes on Birminham Cuneiform Tablets Volume 1," *Acta Sumerologica* 13 (1991) 409–16, esp. 412, for the Flood Hero's not ascending to heaven but not ending up in the netherworld either as meaningful.
- 26 See above, n. 6.
- 27 See Finkel, *Ark before Noah*, 105–10, for a translation; and *ibid.*, 357–68, for a transliteration, translation, and commentary.
- 28 *Atra-ḫašis*, 12.
- 29 "What Ship Goes There," 338–47.
- 30 In this regard, see also George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 512–13, citing J.-J. Glassner, "L'Etéménanki, armature du cosmos," *NABU* 32 (2002) 32–34.
- 31 George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 706–7.
- 32 Holloway, "What Ship Goes There," 339; George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 512–13. According to Elena Cassin, "Cycles du temps et cadres de l'espace en Mésopotamie ancienne," *Revue de Synthèse* 90 (1969) 241–57, esp. 249, each of the six divisions was in turn divided into nine sections, resulting in a total of 63 compartments. On the possible symbolism

- of the numbers three and nine in the design of the ark, see again George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 512–13.
- 33 Finkel, *Ark before Noah*, 107–8.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 125.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 126.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 131–32 and 312.
- 37 Cassin, “Cycles du temps,” 249.
- 38 Lambert and Millard, *Atra-ḫasīs*, 91.
- 39 George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 710.
- 40 *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 217.
- 41 *Ibid.* Horowitz, however, does not cite the primary texts in which this formula is found.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 218. On the different traditions concerning the duration of the Flood defined by the numbers six and seven, see George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 515–16. On the “ascent apocalypses” from the first century CE or later, especially 1 *Enoch* and 2 *Enoch*, and their containing seven heavens, the uppermost level of which is the dwelling of God, see Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 32–41. In this apocalyptic perspective as well, the heaven to which Enoch ascends is understood as a temple (*ibid.*, 25).
- 43 See especially George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 519–21. See also Samuel Noah Kramer and John Maier, *Myths of Enki, the Crafty God* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) 160.
- 44 See Holloway, “What Ship Goes There,” 347, for the use of this word.
- 45 *Atra-ḫasīs*, 12.
- 46 Black et al., *Literature*, 217.
- 47 See the commentary and bibliography on this passage in George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 510–11, where the cryptic nature of the lines is acknowledged, and the relevant phrases are thought of as “loaded with double meaning ... and can be understood to contain favourable and unfavourable predictions.”
- 48 Daniel Reisman, “Ninurta’s Journey to Eridu,” *JCS* 24 (1971) 3–10, esp. 3.
- 49 Izre’el, *Adapa and the South Wind*, 139.
- 50 Annus, “Origin of Watchers,” 284 and n. 6. On Adapa’s affinity to Enoch, see also Annus, “Ninurta and the Son of Man,” 10. The same epithet also characterizes Utnapishtim in the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh* (XI 49; George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 510, 706–7).
- 51 On anointment with oil for the consecration of the king at his accession to the throne as a likely practice at Amorite Mari, see Durand, “Religion ammorite,” 550.
- 52 *Ascent to Heaven*, 40–41 and 46. See Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XLVIII, on the status of the myths of Adapa, Atrahasis, and Gilgamesh as “philosophical and mythological compositions dealing with the ascent and salvation of the soul,” well known to the prophets of the Neo-Assyrian period, “to the extent that they affected the imagery and content of the oracles.” On affinities between mythological literary texts and prophecy, see also Nissinen, “Socioreligious Role,” 97.
- 53 See Chen, “Flood Motif,” 168–71, for a discussion of the Isin period royal hymns *Ishme-Dagan A* and *Instructions of Ur-Ninurta*, which brings up matters of “investiture” in close association with references to a “flood- or storm-like catastrophe.” According to Chen (*ibid.*, 170), “[t]he investiture of the Isin ruler is portrayed as having taken place in the primeval and mythical context so as to establish his legitimacy in high antiquity and a mythical realm.” Flood imagery can also be found in *Ashurbanipal’s Coronation Hymn* (v. 20; Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, 27).
- 54 On the diversity of Flood traditions in ancient Mesopotamian sources, see Chen, “Flood Motif,” 168–71, especially for “traditions that exalted Enlil, Ninurta, and Isin rulers.”
- 55 Black et al., *Literature*, 172; Annus, *Ninurta*, 132.
- 56 Black et al., *Literature*, 179.
- 57 *Treasures of Darkness*, 136–37. In this regard, see also Albright, “Mouth of the Rivers,” 184, where Ishtar’s association with “the fertilizing waters in their destructive aspect as well as their benignity” is mentioned; Abusch, “Inanna/Ishtar,” 453. See, furthermore, Chen, “Flood Motif,” 161, for occurrences of the image of the flood in the earliest stages of Sumerian literature, where they are “metaphors or similes, often to depict the invincible and destructive power of mythical and royal figures.” The examples from early Sumerian literature that feature Inanna in association with a flood are passages from *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* and *Inanna and the Numun-Grass*; both depict Inanna and Dumuzi “delivering the people from a catastrophic event likened to a flood” (*ibid.*, 171–75). The former poem takes place in the legendary age, and the latter depicts a primeval catastrophe. Both attest to a tradition

- connecting Inanna and a flood with notions of primeval history. Chen points to the Old Babylonian period as the turning point in the “historicization” of the Flood incorporated into chronographic traditions such as the *Sumerian King List*.
- 58 *Treasures of Darkness*, 136.
- 59 Tablet XI, vv. 118–24; cited in Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XXIV, n. 49; see George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 710–11: “Bēlet-ilī, the sweet-voiced, wailed aloud: / ‘Indeed the past has truly turned to clay, / because I spoke evil in the assembly of the gods. / How was it I spoke evil in the assembly of the gods, / (and) declared a war to destroy my people? It is I that give birth (to them)! They are my people! / (Now) like so many fish they fill the sea!’”
- 60 In this vein, Finkel (*Ark before Noah*, 89) posits that while it is only partially appropriate to talk about a Mesopotamian Flood Story, the essence of the individual stories that he treats is common.
- 61 *Homeric Questions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996) 146.
- 62 On the notion of a past event being raised to the rank of “example” in the ancient Mesopotamian process of divination, see Glassner, “Historical Times,” 201–3.
- 63 Claus Wilcke, “König Šulgis Himmelfahrt,” *Münchener Beiträge zur Völkerkunde* 1 (1988) 245–55, esp. 254–55; Piotr Steinkeller, “Išbi-Er-ra’s Himmelfahrt,” *NABU* (1992) 3; in both the standard destiny of the ancient Mesopotamian deceased in the netherworld, expressed through funerary offerings, is seen as conflicting with the idea of ascent to heaven. In an attempt to approach this conundrum, Wilcke invokes Adapa’s encountering Dumuzi and Ningishzida, gods of the netherworld, at the gate of heaven when he ascends to the sky, concluding that the discrepancy can nevertheless not be resolved easily. Even though such a dichotomy in the ancient Mesopotamian formulations of the beyond is rare, in ancient Egypt, it is one of the basic conceptions of the afterlife. Rather than being conflicting perspectives, both the terrestrial Osirian and celestial solar concepts belong to a single conception “of the deceased’s eternal existence after death – a view of the afterlife that remained remarkably consistent throughout ancient Egyptian history” (Allen, *Pyramid Texts*, 7). Further on the royal ascent to heaven in the Ur III period and Isin Dynasty, see Mamoru Yoshikawa, “an-šè---a (=è/e₁₁) ‘to die,’” *Acta Sumerologica* 11 (1989) 353; and Daniel A. Foxvog, “Astral Dumuzi,” in Mark E. Cohen, Daniel C. Snell, and David B. Weisberg, eds., *The Tablet and the Scroll: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo* (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 1993) 103–8, esp. 105.
- 64 Aspects of the following analysis are already presented in my previous publications, “Visual Formula”; “‘Time and Eternity’ in the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II,” in Cohen and Kangas, eds., *Assyrian Reliefs*, 159–81; and *Mythology of Kingship*, 83–144. Here, a synoptic rehearsal of its main elements is necessary for highlighting their relevance to understanding the Mari painting.
- 65 Parrot, “Peintures du palais,” 325; Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 84. The architectural affinity between the Mari throne room suite and its Neo-Assyrian counterparts is also discussed in Margueron, *Mari: Métropole de l’Euphrate*, 480. The possible influence of Mari and Dur-Kurigalzu (Aqar Quf) wall paintings on Assyrian wall reliefs is also acknowledged in Perkins, “Narration in Babylonian Art,” 61.
- 66 See above, [Chapter 2](#), n. 37. In this regard, see also Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 116, and 128, where the goddesses holding the flowing vase on the basin of Gudea are, in turn, seen as the ancestors of the Mari goddess.
- 67 The complex and long-standing discussions on the “pre-iconography” and meaning of the Assyrian “sacred tree” are treated in Giovino, *Interpretations*. In the present study, I avoid a lengthy critical analysis of many of these perceptions and theories, past and recent, in presenting my observations on the tree. Because these discussions are highly open ended, it does not seem feasible to try to validate one approach over the other within the maze of available interpretations in presenting a particular view regarding the tree.
- 68 In ancient Mesopotamia, the Sumerian poem *Inana and Šu-kale-tuda* refers to the date palm as “a tree growing forever” and depicts it in relation both to Enki and the Apsû (Black et al., *Literature*, 199). In this regard, see also K. Volk, “Palme,” in *RLA* 10 (2003–5) 283–92, esp. 288. In ancient Egypt, the palm branch hieroglyph, *rnpt*, stood for “year,” and multiple palm branches signified the concept “millions of years,” especially in connection

- with the regnal years of the king and the *sed*-festival. See above, [Introduction](#), n. 89; Dieter Arnold, “Royal Cult Complexes of the Old and Middle Kingdoms,” in Shafer, ed., *Temples*, 31–85, esp. 82–83; Richard H. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art: A Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Egyptian Painting and Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 118–19. See also Ingrid Gamer-Wallert, “Palme,” *LÄ* 4 (1982) 658–59, esp. 59, on the indentations on palm fronds as the life years of the ancient Egyptian king, and the links of the god Thoth with the palm by virtue of his being the “Lord of Time” and “Reckoner of Years.” On the golden race of men who “enjoyed as long a life as the date-palm” in the Orphic *Rhapsodic Theogony*, see West, *Orphic Poems*, 75. A compelling case for associating the Assyrian tree and the major elements of the Assyrian vegetal ornamental repertoire with the Nilotic lotus, *Nymphaea nouchali*, rather than the date palm, has been made in J. Andrew McDonald, “Botanical Determination of the Middle Eastern Tree of Life,” *Economic Botany* 56 (2002) 113–29.
- 69 On representations of divinities holding the ring without the rod in the art of ancient Mesopotamia of the first millennium BCE, see Douglas Van Buren, “Rod and Ring,” 447–50.
- 70 See above, [Chapter 1](#), n. 15.
- 71 On perceptions of the undulating elements, spirals, and curlicues of the Assyrian “sacred tree” as water courses, see Giovino, *Interpretations*, 115–16, citing Walter Andrae and Edith Porada. See also Winter, “Rhetoric of Abundance,” 253, citing Porada.
- 72 For a classification of the decorative patterns within the inner field of the Assyrian “sacred tree” as “rayed,” “lattice,” and “double-garland,” see Pauline Albenda, “Assyrian Sacred Trees in the Brooklyn Museum,” *Iraq* 56 (1994) 123–34.
- 73 See Giovino, *Interpretations*, 9–20, on the older scholarship that associated the Assyrian “sacred tree” with the mythical *kiškānu* tree and Eridu, Enki/Ea’s city.
- 74 See again Eliade, *Patterns*, 267, cited in [Chapter 2](#), n. 50; as well as Eliade, *Shamanism*, 271, where the “world tree” as attested in several traditions, such as Aegean, Mesopotamian, and Indian, is understood as a representation of “the universe in continual regeneration, the inexhaustible spring of cosmic life, the paramount reservoir of the sacred.”
- 75 This matter is discussed in detail in Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, 83–144.
- 76 “The tree is surely based upon the date palm; literally neither ‘Tree of Life’ nor ‘Sacred Tree’ from any known Assyrian text, although often referred to as such in the modern literature, it more likely has overtones of a generic ‘Tree of Abundance,’ which quality the tree embodies through its highly stylized composite construction” (Winter, “Rhetoric of Abundance,” 253).
- 77 Genesis 4. 22 makes it clear that whoever eats of the Tree of Life planted in the Garden of Eden will live forever. Coomaraswamy understands the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life as one “continuous stem having two parts, of which one extends as the Axis of the Universe from Earth to Heaven, while the other branches above the roof of the world in Paradise,” respectively (“The Inverted Tree,” in *Traditional Art and Symbolism*, 376–404, esp. 377). He points out that the *Zohar* “distinguishes the Trees as higher and lower, in the one of which is life and in the other death, and he who confuses them brings death upon himself in this world and has no portion in the world to come” (*ibid.*, 382).
- 78 See above, [Chapter 2](#), n. 47.
- 79 As expressed by Eliade (*Shamanism*, 403), “[t]he birch or the post with seven or nine notches symbolizes the Cosmic Tree and hence is believed to stand at the ‘Center of the World.’ By climbing it the shaman reaches the highest heaven and stands face to face with Bai Ülġän.” See further *ibid.*, 405, for the relation between shamanic and Vedic ascent to heaven, whereby the Buddha is quoted as saying: “I am the highest in the world, I am best in the world, I am eldest in the world. This is the last birth, there is not now again becoming.” On Babylonian influence on Vedic, Altaic, and Siberian cosmological conceptions, see again *ibid.*, 406.
- 80 See *ibid.*, 157, on the role of the eagle in shamanism. See also Naydler, *Shamanic Wisdom*, 203, which states that in ancient Egypt the falcon has the same role as the eagle in shamanism.
- 81 On the connection between the eagle and the tree, especially in the eagle’s role as the robber of the source of life, *soma*, in ancient India, see Holmberg, *Baum des Lebens*, 65, comparing the ancient Mesopotamian myth of Etana, with an illustration of an Assyrian cylinder seal impression depicting the “sacred tree” surmounted by the winged disk (*ibid.*, Fig. 24).

- 82 The usual identification of the lion-headed eagle, an emblematic aspect of the imagery of the Early Dynastic period in ancient Mesopotamia, with Imdugud/Anzû especially in relation to the god Ningirsu, is, however, an uncertain matter. For a basic assessment, see E. A. Braun-Holzinger, “Löwenadler,” *RLA* 7 (1987–90) 94–97, esp. 96.
- 83 See above, [Introduction](#), nn. 34 and 37. On bird-headed or bird-masked figures in Mittanian and Middle Assyrian art as possibly referring to ritual practices originally at home among the Hurrians, see Edith Porada, “Remarks on Mitannian (Hurrian) and Middle Assyrian Glyptic Art,” *Akkadica* 13 (1979) 2–15, esp. 5. See also *ibid.*, 7, for an interpretation of the conflict scenes on the seals of the Middle Assyrian kings and Ashur-uballit (1363–28 BCE) and Eriba-Adad (1055–54 BCE) as referring to death-dealing forces and their defeat by creatures “who shared their monstrous form.”
- 84 “Winged Disks and Sacred Trees,” esp. 573–79.
- 85 Holloway (“What Ship Goes There,” 336), without questioning the long-standing argument that the Mari painting depicts an actual portion of the palace, draws attention to those visual elements in the painting that parallel aspects of the biblical description of the Temple of Solomon, which in and of themselves are extremely compelling. Likewise, in the composition of the Assyrian “sacred tree” flanked by winged beings, John Malcolm Russel sees a reflection of the “‘figures of cherubim, palm-trees, and open flowers’ reportedly carved on the walls of Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 6:29)” (“The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud: Issues in the Research and Presentation of Assyrian Art,” *AJA* 102 [1998] 655–716, esp. 690). On the ancient Mesopotamian temple as a venue that “had its holy grove with its own ‘Tree of Life’ as well as its ‘apsû,’” especially based on the inscriptions of Warad-Sin (1834–23 BCE) and Rim-Sin (1822–1763 BCE) and its Palestinian parallels, see Widengren, *King and the Tree of Life*, 9 and 36; Giovino, *Interpretations*, 197–99.

4 THE SEMANTICS OF THE FRAME OF RUNNING SPIRALS

- 1 See above, [Chapter 2](#), nn. 60–61.
- 2 *Peintures murales*, 67–69. See, however, Koehl, “Near Eastern Contribution,” 172–73, referring to the Mari podium spirals as “retorted

spirals,” because rather than fully continuous, here “the paintbrush was lifted at the retort, that is, the center of the spiral”; and arguing for a Minoan hand in this painting, since unlike their Mari counterparts, Cretan craftsmen would have been more familiar with the “richly veined or variegated” stones.

- 3 See Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, pls. 214–15, where the spirals are quite readable if they are not in the illustration provided ([Fig. 16](#)).
- 4 On this aspect of the Apsû as the Sea (*tâmtu*), or the conflation of the Apsû with the Sea, on which the earth’s surface sits, surrounded by it, see Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 340, citing the *Shamash Hymn*. For a translation of this poem, “a second-millennium compilation using some older materials and reworking imagery known elsewhere,” see Foster, *Before the Muses*, 627. The affinity or proximity between the Apsû and the Sea may also be clear in the passage from the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh* quoted above, [Chapter 2](#), n. 47. On the ancient Egyptian primordial ocean Nun as an aquatic element surrounding and penetrating the ordered world, see Erik Hornung, “Chaotische Bereiche in der geordneten Welt,” *ZÄS* 81 (1956) 28–32, esp. 29, where Nun is described as being in heaven, on earth, and in the depths of the netherworld. It surrounds, like *oceanos*, the earth, but it is as well deep below, as ground water and the source of the Nile inundation. In these respects, the ancient Egyptian Nun has an affinity to the ancient Mesopotamian Apsû. On these aspects of Nun, see also Jean Leclant, “Espace et temps, ordre et chaos dans l’Égypte pharaonique,” *Revue de Synthèse* 90 (1969) 218–39, esp. 224–27; James P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts*, Yale Egyptological Studies 2 (New Haven, CT : Yale Egyptological Seminar, 1988) 4. Further on the affinity between Nun and the Apsû, as well as the celestial counterpart of the former, see Albright, “Mouth of the Rivers,” 166–67. Like Nun, the Apsû may also have been thought to have a heavenly counterpart, especially in light of the visual record of the Neo-Sumerian period. Both on the basin of Gudea ([Fig. 19](#)) and the Stela of Urnamma, there are goddesses, albeit without wings, hovering

- in the air and holding the flowing vase. See Douglas Van Buren, *Flowing Vase*, 66–67, for a reading of the Neo-Sumerian designs as depicting goddesses bringing “down from heaven the fertilizing rains, while the other goddesses bestow upon the earth the springs and brooks drawn from the heavenly ocean.” See also *ibid.*, 107–8, for a discussion of Assyrian seals that feature streams connecting or juxtaposing earth and heaven. Finally, see *ibid.*, 9, for a statement that Anu, the god of heaven, possessed “numerous jugs containing the water of life which he could bestow upon those whom he wished especially to honour,” referring to the Adapa myth.
- 5 Malamat, *Mari and the Bible*, 25, where the relevant passage is quoted in translation, with the remark that in it the Mediterranean is referred to twice as *tāmtum* (*tiamtum*), “used ... in a secular, empirical sense. By contrast, the solemn term *ayabba* [derived from the Sumerian A.AB.BA], recorded three times, has a mythological aura to it.” Because of its direct origins in Mari and key relevance to the present thematic framework, I include here this quotation in its entirety: “Since days of old, when god built Mari, no king residing in Mari had reached the sea (*tāmtum*). To the Cedar Mountain and the Boxwood (Mountain) ... they had not reached ... But Yakhdun-Lim ... marched to the shore of the sea (*tāmtum*) in irresistible strength. To the Ocean (*ayabba*, “Vast Sea”) he offered his great sacrifices, and his troops cleansed themselves with water in the Ocean (*ayabba*). To the Cedar and Boxwood Mountain, the great mountains, he penetrated, and boxwood, cedar, cypress (or juniper?) and *elamakum* trees, these trees he felled. He stripped (the forest) bare(?), established his name, and made known his might. He subjugated that land on the shore of the Ocean (*ayabba*). He made it obedient to his command; he caused it to follow him. He imposed a permanent tax upon them that they should bring their taxes to him regularly (Yahdun-Lim Foundation Inscription col. i 34–iii 2).” See also Durand, “Religion ammorite,” 289, n. 345; and 293–94, on the hostile associations of the terms *ayabba* and *ti’amtum* (Tēmtum at Mari), Sea, or the Mediterranean Sea, in the religion of Amorite Mari. On related matters, see furthermore Durand, “Le mythologème du combat entre le dieu de l’orage et la mer en Mésopotamie,” *M.A.R.I.* 7 (1993) 41–61.
 - 6 See above, [Chapter 1](#), n. 4. For examples of Anatolian running spirals from the Assyrian Trade Colony (ca. 1920–1740 BCE) and Old Hittite periods, see Nimet Özgüç, “Excavations at Acemhöyük,” *Anadolu (Anatolia)* 10 (1966) 29–52, pls. XVIII and XXVI; and Joan Aruz, Kim Benzel, and Jean M. Evans, eds., *Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C.* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2008) 176.
 - 7 Erik Hornung, “Zeitliches Jenseits im alten Ägypten,” *Eranos* 47 (1979) 269–307, esp. 281–82, 288, 299; Hornung, *Valley of the Kings*, 74.
 - 8 See especially Carolina López-Ruiz, *When the Gods Were Born: Greek Cosmogonies and the Near East* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010) 118, where the Greek god Kronos is associated with this concept, which “appears in Greek myth in the form of a distant utopian land reserved for the best souls, the Isles of the Blessed and the Elysian Fields.”
 - 9 Hornung, “Zeitliches Jenseits,” 283; Hornung, *Valley of the Kings*, 142.
 - 10 *Valley of the Kings*, 90.
 - 11 Hornung, *Valley of the Kings*, 90; Schweizer, *Sungod’s Journey*, 175.
 - 12 On this scene, see Piankoff, *Tomb of Ramesses VI*, 314–16; Hornung, “Zeitliches Jenseits,” 290; Hornung, *Valley of the Kings*, 90; Hornung, *Books of the Afterlife*, 41; Abt and Hornung, *Knowledge for the Afterlife*, 140.
 - 13 On the association of the “mouth of the rivers” (*pī nārātī*) of the Flood story with the flowing vase, see again Albright, “Mouth of the Rivers,” 166–67.
 - 14 Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, figs. 219–220 are clear illustrations of the fish shown swimming both toward and away from the vase on the statue of the goddess from Mari.
 - 15 Agnès Spycket, *La statuaire du Proche-Orient ancien* (Leiden and Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1981) 191, and nn. 36 and 231.
 - 16 *Ibid.*
 - 17 “Zeitliches Jenseits,” 305.
 - 18 Hornung, *Idea into Image*, 65. On Osiris’ exclusion from the solar ascent, see Hornung, *Books of the Afterlife*, 41; Abt and Hornung, *Knowledge for the Afterlife*, 142–43; Schweizer, *Sungod’s Journey*, 176.

- 19 On these characteristics of Osiris, see James, *Tree of Life*, 7.
- 20 See above, Chapter 2, n. 100.
- 21 Hornung, *Valley of the Kings*, 103–4 and 107; Schweizer, *Sungod's Journey*, 99. On Apophis' embodying both negative and positive features, the latter on account of its affinity with the *ouroboric* snake, see also Erik Hornung, "Verfall und Regeneration der Schöpfung," *Eranos* 46 (1977) 411–49, esp. 434.
- 22 For an understanding of the ancient Mesopotamian Flood as a return to the undifferentiated or primordial state of the cosmos preceding creation, see Cassin, "Cycles du temps," 249.
- 23 "He [Ea] tied up Apsu, he killed him, / Mummu he bound, he locked him securely. / He found his dwelling upon Apsu" (69–71; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 441). On the probable date of *Enuma Elish* as late second millennium BCE, see *ibid.*, 436; Karen Sonik, "Bad King, False King, True King: Apsû and His Heirs," *JAOS* 128 (2008) 737–43, esp. 737, n. 1.
- 24 *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972) 17.
- 25 III 139–41; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 462.
- 26 On the co-extensiveness of "life-giving waters" and the "waters of death" in ancient Mesopotamian texts, see also Annus, "Origin of Watchers," 302.
- 27 "What Ship Goes There," 331. On the Apsû as the ultimate model for the archetypal temple of Babylon, Esagila or E-Sangil, see A. R. George, "E-sangil and E-temen-anki, the Archetypal Cult-Center," in J. Renger, ed., *Babylon: Focus mesopotamischer Geschichte, Wiege früher Gelehrsamkeit, Mythos in der Moderne*, 67–86 (Saarbrücken: SDV, 1999) 67–70.
- 28 "What Ship Goes There," 332.
- 29 See again Annus, "Origin of Watchers," 303, for cogent observations on the interconnectiveness of the deluge, river, sea, and Apsû, the latter not being devoid of negative or destructive connotations. On the ambivalent nature of the Apsû in the Babylonian poem of creation as a primordial ancestor of all the gods on the one hand and as an almost "monstrous" force to reckon with on the other, see Sonik, "Bad King, False King." Bell ("Example of Luxor," 129) also underscores a similar duality in the symbolism of the Nile, with the water granting life also having the potential to deal death; when the river was too high, it could bring destructive flood, when it was too low it could cause devastating famine.
- 30 See Hornung, *Books of the Afterlife*, 37–38, on the sixth hour of the *Amduat*, in which the sun god confronts his arch-enemy Apophis; as well as *ibid.*, 64–66; and Schweizer, *Sungod's Journey*, 120, on the affinity between Nun and Apophis in the sixth hour of *Amduat*. See also Hornung, *Valley of the Kings*, 104, on "darkness and the watery abyss" preceding the creation as the home of Apophis.
- 31 On the affinity between streams of water and serpents in a discussion of the ancient Mesopotamian Apsû and the ancient Egyptian Nun, see Albright, "Mouth of the Rivers," 166–68. In this regard, see also P. de Miroschedji, "Le dieu élamite au serpent et aux eaux jaillissantes," *Iranica Antiqua* 2 (1981) 1–25, esp. 16; and also Dominique Collon, "Syrian Glyptic and the Thera Wall Paintings," in Sherratt, ed., *Wall Paintings of Thera*, vol. 1, 283–94, esp. 289–90. Most recently, see Naomi F. Miller, "Symbols of Abundance in the Royal Cemetery at Ur, Iraq," *AJA* 117 (2013) 127–33, where the motifs are again understood in a primarily agrarian sense. On zigzags and wavy lines as evoking simultaneously water and snakes in the late prehistoric (Chalcolithic) Susiana culture of Iran, see Margaret Cool Root, "Systems of Symbolic Expression," in Root, ed., *This Fertile Land*, 47–64, esp. 58–59.
- 32 Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 40. On this vessel, see also Joan Aruz, "Cylindrical Vessel with Heroes and Animals," in Joan Aruz with Ronald Wallenfels, eds., *Art of the First Cities: The Third Millennium B.C. from the Mediterranean to the Indus*, 330–32 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).
- 33 de Miroschedji, "Dieu élamite," pl. 8. The connection between streams and serpents in this monument is also noted by Agnès Benoit, "Stele of Untash-Napirisha," in Prudence O. Harper, Joan Aruz, and Françoise Tallon, eds., *The Royal City of Susa: Ancient Near Eastern Treasures in the Louvre*, 127–30 (New York: The Metropolitan Museum, 1993 [1992]) esp. 130, where the snakes coiling up the sides of the stela are also seen as the equivalent of the Apsû encircling the world.
- 34 Douglas Van Buren, *Flowing Vase*, 98–99; de Miroschedji, "Dieu élamite," 9–15.

- 35 Hornung, *Books of the Afterlife*, 62.
- 36 Hornung, “Zeitliches Jenseits,” 283–84; Hornung, *Books of the Afterlife*, 60–62.
- 37 Hornung, “Zeitliches Jenseits,” 283–84; Hornung, *Books of the Afterlife*, 62.
- 38 Hornung, “Zeitliches Jenseits,” 284–85; Hornung, *Books of the Afterlife*, 62–63.
- 39 The doubly twisted rope underlies the guilloche, widespread in the ornamental repertoire of ancient Mesopotamia, including the fragments of wall paintings from Court 31 at Mari, on which see Parrot, *Peintures murales*, 2–3. Although not encountered as a full-fledged ornamental pattern in ancient Egypt, the guilloche may be thought of as a cousin of the running spirals, which, in turn, are not found in the ancient Mesopotamian ornamental repertoire outside Mari. On the guilloche as a braid or “a simple two-strand interlace pattern widespread in ancient Near Eastern decorative arts,” see Alois Riegl, *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament* (*Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik*), trans. Evelyn Kain (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992 [1893]) 85–86 and “Glossary,” s.v. “guilloche.” On the use of the guilloche in the ornamental repertoire of the glazed brick panel of Shalmaneser III and its interpretation as water, see Winter, “Rhetoric of Abundance,” 256, and n. 28, drawing attention to the affinity between the guilloche and the running spirals. On the guilloche in Old Syrian seals and its symbolizing water, see also Collon, “Syrian Glyptic and the Thera Wall Paintings,” 288, where the Mari painting running spirals are thought of as an example of the guilloche as well. Further on the guilloche in Assyrian art, especially in the ninth century BCE, and its sources and background in ancient Mesopotamian and Anatolian art, see Albenda, *Ornamental Wall Painting*, 101–6.
- 40 On the occurrence of the serpent as a symbol of time in ancient Greece and the Near East, as well as the symbolic affinity between rivers and snakes, see also López-Ruiz, *When the Gods Were Born*, 155–56, noting how the toughest enemy of the ruler god of ancient Near Eastern myths frequently takes the form of a serpent-like monster, such as Typhon, Illuyanka, and Apophis.
- 41 The definition of the ancient Egyptian concepts of *djet* and *neheh* is controversial, even though both are taken to mean “eternity” without being its exact synonym. When paired together, they represent the sum total of all time in the beyond, the equivalent of the phrase “millions of years.” An association of *djet* with the netherworld, Osiris, continuity, and duration; and that of *neheh* with the sun god Re, solar revolution, cyclical repetition, and discontinuity seem to represent a common ground of thinking at least between Jan Assmann, *Zeit und Ewigkeit im alten Ägypten: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Ewigkeit* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1975) and Hornung, *Idea into Image*, 64–69. As such, Assmann (*Zeit und Ewigkeit*, 12) sees *neheh* as the unending quality of the discontinuous units of time, and *djet* as the unlimited nature of its continuous dimension. For a brief overview of the scholarly controversy over the definition of the two terms, see Hornung, *Idea into Image*, 68. See also Hornung, “Zeitliches Jenseits,” esp. 298. For a different view that favors seeing *djet* as connected more with the spatial aspects of time and eternity than with eternity itself, especially in relation to representations of temporality within the space delineated as the netherworld in the *Amduat*, see Hegenbarth-Reichardt, “Von Zeiten und Räumen,” esp. 5–7, citing the work of W. Westendorf.
- 42 Cassin, “Cycles du temps,” 241–42; Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, 10, where the phrase is interpreted as “the totality of future time”; Katz, “Time in Death,” 120; Ignace J. Gelb et al., eds., *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2006) s.v. *palû* A mng 4, which defines the word as “term of office,” “rotation in office”; and the phrase *ana dūr u pala* as “for all future time,” “in perpetuity.” On the concept of duration, Akkadian *dārûm*, especially in its implications of permanence that characterizes the state of the existence of the gods in contrast to the limited human life span, see Cancik-Kirschbaum, “Zeit und Ewigkeit,” 46.
- 43 Cancik-Kirschbaum, “Zeit und Ewigkeit,” 44–45.
- 44 “Historical Times,” 195–96.
- 45 On the running spiral form as bearing implications for conceptions of space in ancient Mesopotamia, see Winter, “Reading Concepts of Space,” 70.
- 46 Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament*, Bollingen Series 35/38 (Princeton,

- NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992) 207 and 234–35.
- 47 On this piece, see Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 99, which states that the dedication was probably inscribed on the missing portion of the vessel. See also Béatrice André-Salvini, “Lid Decorated with Intertwined Snakes,” in Aruz, with Wallenfels, eds., *Art of the First Cities*, 442–43, esp. 442, quoting Henri de Genouillac, who “said he had found ‘nearly everywhere on this site [Girsu] fragments of terracotta boxes and lids with reliefs of snakes.’”
- 48 On Ningishzida and the mush-hush serpent, see Claudia E. Suter, *Gudea’s Temple Building: The Representation of an Early Mesopotamian Ruler in Text and Image* (Groningen: STYX, 2000) 66–68, noting that the association of the serpent with Ningishzida “is manifest only in Gudea’s art.”
- 49 According to Frankfort (*Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 99), the god “represents natural vitality in its chthonic aspect, and is therefore identified by two intertwined snakes.”
- 50 See Suter, *Gudea’s Temple Building*, 167–68 and 195–97, where it is mentioned that only “two points” of the astral symbol remain.
- 51 Aruz, with Wallenfels, eds., *Art of the First Cities*, 445. See Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 67–68, drawing attention to the affinity between the basin of Gudea and the Urnamma stela in their employing the same pictorial matter, “a libation in front of high gods, blessed by winged goddesses pouring water.” See also Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 102.
- 52 A succinct description of the imagery of the basin can be found in Suter, *Gudea’s Temple Building*, 62.
- 53 Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 98.
- 54 See above, [Chapter 2](#), n. 46.
- 55 On the heavenly Nile and the Nile of the netherworld as embodiments also of the celestial ocean and the subterranean ocean, Nun, see Albright, “Mouth of the Rivers,” 167, which also points out the interchangeability of the river *Ḫubur* with the *Apsû* in the ancient Mesopotamian sources. See, furthermore, James, *Tree of Life*, on the celestial counterpart of the Nile. On the watery implications of the sky and the Milky Way in ancient Egypt, see Mark Lehner, *The Complete Pyramids: Solving the Ancient Mysteries* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001 [1997]) 29. Widengren (*King and the Tree of Life*, 15) quotes from a royal hymn to Urnamma: “Tigris and Euphrates o Ur-Nammu/from the foundations of heaven and earth thou causest to go out,” revealing the presence of both terrestrial and celestial sources for the two rivers. On the “celestial river” in ancient Indo-European thought, including both Vedic and Greek sources, see West, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth*, 350–51. See, furthermore, William W. Malandra, *An Introduction to Ancient Iranian Religion: Readings from the Avesta and Achaemenid Royal Inscriptions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) 11, on the cosmic mountain and cosmic ocean in Indo-Iranian lore, whereby “the primary source of water ... was river water. Its source was the cosmic ocean or sea, located in heaven. From it flowed a mighty river or rivers down the cosmic mountain to the earth to become various rivers. These flowed into the sea, from which they flowed back, in a manner that is unclear, into the heavenly ocean, so completing the cycle.” This description reflects remarkable parallels with the visual imagery of mountain, water, and heaven in the so-called Kassite “attractive style” (see above, [Chapter 2](#), n. 46 and below, [Chapter 5](#), n. 55), which, in turn, is relevant to the Neo-Sumerian schemes of aerial and terrestrial flowing vases, as discussed in [Chapter 2](#). On the netherworld and its celestial connections in both ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, see Hornung, *Books of the Afterlife*, 6; Wolfgang Heimpel, “The Sun at Night and the Doors of Heaven in Babylonian Texts,” *JCS* 38 (1986) 127–51, where the presence of the sun simultaneously in the interior of heaven and the netherworld at night is seen as a problem that needs to be resolved, rather than as a complex cosmological matter that reveals the co-extensiveness between these two domains.
- 56 See Coomaraswamy’s observations on Gudea’s vase ([Fig. 39](#)) in *Guardians of the Sun-Door*, 13, where the figural depiction on the vessel is understood as “a doorway guarded by ‘external janitors and paired serpents within’”; and 46, where the wand between the two snakes is interpreted as a *caduceus*, the vestige of the tree identified with Tammuz as Soma, quoting Douglas Van Buren, “the two guardians who stood at the eastern gate of Heaven were

- Gizzida, ‘Tree of Truth,’ and Dumuzi, ‘Tree of Life,’ either as custodians of the two magic trees, or as themselves embodiments of the trees.” On the *caduceus* form, intertwined snake coils, and their relation to the chthonic Sumerian god Ningishzida in the art of the Early Dynastic period, see Henri Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals: A Documentary Essay on the Art and Religion of the Ancient Near East* (London: Macmillan, 1939) 71. On the snake god in the Sargonic period, see *ibid.*, 119–20.
- 57 See above, n. 6. For a discussion of borders of guilloches and running spirals in Syro-Cappadocian and Anatolian seals of the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, see Douglas Van Buren, *Flowing Vase*, 123–30; and Maurits N. Van Loon, *Anatolia in the Second Millennium B.C., Iconography of Religions* 15, Mesopotamia and the Near East 12 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985) 10–11, where examples of mythological scenes on the glyptic of the Hittite Old Kingdom are discussed, with a note that their “bordering twists and spirals ... clearly signify water.” For illustrations of examples, see also Edith Porada, *Corpus of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in North American Collections* (New York: Pantheon, 1948) pls. CXXXVII 909 E, CXL 930, CXLIII 945 E, CXLIV 950 E, CXLV 960 E, CXLVI 968; Dominique Collon, *First Impressions: Cylinder Seals in the Ancient Near East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press and London: British Museum, 1988) no. 147.
- 58 *Malatya A/8* in Winfried Orthmann, *Untersuchungen zur spätethitischen Kunst* (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1971) 520.
- 59 For a basic formal and iconographic analysis, see Orthmann, *Untersuchungen*, 437–39, where the lack of context for this unique image is lamented, but the overall mythical nature of the depiction is acknowledged.
- 60 Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., “A Brief Commentary on the Hittite Illuyanka Myth (CTH 321),” in Martha T. Roth et al., eds., *Studies Presented to Robert D. Biggs, June 4, 2004*, 119–40, From the Workshop of the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary 2 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2007) 124. On the identification of the scene possibly as an episode from the myth of Illuyanka, see Hans G. Güterbock, “Narration in Anatolian, Syrian, and Assyrian Art,” *AJA* 61 (1957) 62–71, esp. 64–65; Akurgal, *Art of the Hittites*, 81–82, comparing also the ancient Greek myth of Typhon, which it sees as a descendant of the Anatolian myth.
- 61 See Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., trans. and Gary M. Beckman, ed., *Hittite Myths*, Society of Biblical Literature, Writings from the Ancient World 2 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990) 10–14, for translations into English of both versions; Hoffner, “Brief Commentary,” 120. For a transliteration, translation, and commentary of the longer version, as well as a list of the scholarly literature on this myth, see also Gary M. Beckman, “The Anatolian Myth of Illuyanka,” *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 14 (1982) 11–25, esp. 22–23, on the presence in the text of a reference to a body of subterranean water associated with the god Ea and the Apsû.
- 62 For a translation, see Hoffner, trans. and Beckman, ed., *Hittite Myths*, 52–61. A detailed synoptic overview can be found in Maciej Popko, *Religions of Asia Minor*, trans. Iwona Zych (Warsaw: Dialog, 1995) 124–25.
- 63 Hoffner, trans. and Beckman, ed., *Hittite Myths*, 58–60. See, nevertheless, Van Loon, *Anatolia*, 12, where a “snake-haired” human figure emerging “from beneath a deified pile of rocks” on the mythological scene of a cylinder seal dated to the fifteenth century BCE is understood as a representation of Ullikummi. The group of gods in which the snake-haired figure appears is designated by Van Loon as “various chthonic deities.”
- 64 The ophidian aspects of Typhon are clear in the phrase “and from his shoulders there were a hundred heads of a snake, a terrible dragon’s” (*Theogony* 824–25) as translated by Glenn W. Most, *Hesiod: Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) 68–69. On the interconnectedness of the myths of Illuyanka, Ullikummi, and Typhon, see Hans Gustav Güterbock, “The Hittite Version of the Hurrian Kumarbi Myths: Oriental Forerunners of Hesiod,” *AJA* 52 (1948) 123–34, esp. 130–31; and Ekrem Akurgal, *The Birth of Greek Art: The Mediterranean and the Near East*, trans., Wayne Dynes (London: Methuen, 1968 [1966]) 165–66.
- 65 See Piotr Taracha, *Religions of Second Millennium Anatolia* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009) 92, on the Kumarbi cycle’s being “part of the narrative tradition of the *Chaoskampf*

- in Syrian and Mesopotamian mythical and epic tradition.” A recent study focused on the mythological conflict between aquatic forces representing a primordial cosmos, often depicted as “chaos,” and storm gods of various ancient Near Eastern deities is Margo Kitts, “The Near Eastern *Chaoskampf* in the River Battle of Iliad 21,” *JANER* 13 (2013) 86–112.
- 66 On the storm and flood imagery in cataclysmic encounters between gods such as Tishpak, Ninurta, and Ishtar and their opponents, especially the dragon that Tishpak slays in a text likely predating the Babylonian poem of cosmogony, see Theodore J. Lewis, “CT 13.33–34 and Ezekiel 32: Lion-Dragon Myths,” *JAOS* 116 (1996) 28–47, esp. 30–33 and 43–45. In this respect, see also F. A. M. Wiggermann, “Tišpak, his Seal, and the Dragon mušhuššu,” in O. M. C. Haex, H. H. Curvers; P. M. M. G. Akkermans, eds., *To the Euphrates and Beyond: Archaeological Studies in Honour of Maurits N. van Loon*, 117–33 (Rotterdam and Brookfield: A. A. Balkema, 1989) esp. 117–18, for the parallels between the cosmic upheaval punished by the serpent created by Enlil in the so-called *Labbu*-Myth and the depiction of the Flood in the *Poem of Atra-ḥasis*.
- 67 See below, Chapter 5, n. 14.
- 68 *Untersuchungen*, 437–39.
- 69 Taracha, *Religions*, 82; Trevor Bryce, *The World of the Neo-Hittite Kingdoms: A Political and Military History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) 15.
- 70 Bryce, *Neo-Hittite Kingdoms*, 63.
- 71 See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Time and Eternity* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2001) 40, n. 20, on the nature of temporal “eternity” and possibilities of an exit even therefrom.
- 72 On connections among water, snakes, and the ancient Greek Time god, Chronos, occurring mostly in the early philosophers and in Orphic theogonies and cosmogonies, see López-Ruiz, *Before the Gods Were Born*, 158. For a broader discussion of the gods associated with time and eternity in ancient Near Eastern and Greek traditions, including Chronos, Kronos, El, see *ibid.*, 121 and 151–53, especially in relation to El’s epithets “eternal,” “eternal king,” “father of years”; and those of Kronos, “eternal father,” “father of vast eternity.”
- 5 **IMPLICATIONS OF SACRAL TIME AND ESCHATOLOGY**
- 1 On the earlier development of the Sumerian King List, going back to the Sargonic period, see Piotr Steinkeller, “An Ur III Manuscript of the Sumerian King List,” in Walther Sallaberger, Konrad Volk, and Annette Zgoll, eds., *Literatur, Politik und Recht in Mesopotamien: Festschrift für Claus Wilcke*, 267–92 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003); Gianni Marchesi, “The Sumerian King List and the Early History of Mesopotamia,” *Quaderni di Vicino Oriente* 5 (2010) 231–48; M. R. Bachvarova, “From ‘Kingship in Heaven’ to King Lists: Syro-Anatolian Courts and the History of the World,” *JANER* 12 (2012) 97–118, esp. 100.
- 2 The classic study with the complete transliteration and translation is Jacobsen, *Sumerian King List*. On the Vedic doctrine of the *yugas*, see Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return*, 113–15; and Eliade, “Le temps et l’éternité dans la pensée indienne,” *Erano* 20 (1952) 220–52, esp. 224–29. On cyclicity in the *Sumerian King List* as an innovation introduced during the Isin period, see Steinkeller, “An Ur III Manuscript,” 285–86. Further on temporal cyclicity, referred to as “a circularity in time,” in the *Sumerian King List*, see Glassner, “Historical Times,” 192–94.
- 3 See above, *Introduction*, n. 74, for matters of translation.
- 4 For publications and discussions of these texts, see Ernst F. Weidner, “Texte – Wörter – Sachen,” *Archiv für Orientforschung* 13 (1939–40) 230–37, esp. 234–37, under the subheading “Babylonische Prophezeiungen”; A. K. Grayson and W. G. Lambert, “Akkadian Prophecies,” *JCS* 18 (1964) 7–30; W. W. Hallo, “Akkadian Apocalypses,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 16 (1966) 231–42; A. K. Grayson, *Babylonian Historical-Literary Texts* (Toronto and Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press, 1975) 13–23; Stephen A. Kaufman, “Prediction, Prophecy, and Apocalypse in the Light of New Akkadian Texts,” *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies* 1 (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1977) 221–28; W. G. Lambert, *The Background of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1978) 9–13; Helmer Ringgren, “Akkadian Apocalypses,” in David Hellholm, ed., *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism*, 379–86 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck],

- 1983); Paul-Alain Beaulieu, “The Historical Background of the Uruk Prophecy,” in Cohen, Snell, Weisberg, eds., *Tablet and the Scroll*, 41–52.
- 5 Piotr Michalowski, “History as Charter: Some Observations on the Sumerian King List,” *JAOS* 103 (1983) 237–48, esp. 240 and 243; and Edzard, “Vision du passé,” 162.
 - 6 On the *Sumerian King List* as a manifestation of the ancient Mesopotamian conceptions of time, especially in connecting individual time spans, represented in the form of reigns, within a broader “objective time” characterized by continuity, renewal, and the benchmark set by the Flood, see Cancik-Kirschbaum, “Zeit und Ewigkeit,” 44–45. Cancik-Kirschbaum aptly links the *Sumerian King List* with other chronological lists, such as year and eponym lists, from ancient Mesopotamia, although she sees the text as conveying a primarily “linear” sense of time, not acknowledging the revolving pattern of kingship depicted in it.
 - 7 See, most recently, *ibid.*, 43, where it is argued that eschatological or apocalyptic thought is not part of the ancient Mesopotamian world view. Cancik-Kirschbaum (*ibid.*, 44) further posits that according to the ancient Mesopotamian perspective world history was characterized by constant change and renewal rather than a pre-determined end, seeing both Marduk’s reorganizing the cosmos in the Babylonian poem of cosmogony and the myth of the great Flood as instances of a new beginning.
 - 8 The quotation is from Hallo, “Akkadian Apocalypses,” 241–42. Grayson and Lambert (“Akkadian Prophecies,” 10) note the many similarities between these texts and the Book of Daniel. See, furthermore, W. G. Lambert, “History and the Gods: A Review Article,” *Orientalia* 39 (1970) 170–77, esp. 177; Grayson, *Historical-Literary Texts*, 4 and 22; Kaufman, “Prediction, Prophecy,” 225–28; Lambert, *Background of Jewish Apocalyptic*, 13; Ringgren, “Akkadian Apocalypses,” 386; Foster, “End of Time,” 25–26.
 - 9 Translation in Beaulieu, “Historical Background,” 44. For a balanced assessment of the question at hand, pointing out the openness of the “debate over the significance of Akkadian prophecies for our understanding of such a significant phenomenon as Jewish apocalyptic,” see *ibid.*, 42 and 52. For one of the earliest statements that connect the “Akkadian Prophecies” with possible Babylonian conceptions of *Endzeit*, see Weidner, “Texte,” 235. An “apocalypticizing” tendency has also been seen in two fragmentary texts from Old Babylonian Mari in Jack M. Sasson, “An Apocalyptic Vision from Mari?: Speculations on ARM X:9,” *M.A.R.I.* 1 (1982) 151–67; and Sasson, “Mari Apocalypticism Revisited,” in K. van Lerberghe and A. Schoors, eds., *Immigration and Emigration within the Ancient Near East: Festschrift E. Lipiński*, 285–95 (Leuven: Peeters, 1995). Both studies conclude that an apocalyptic perspective would not have been confined to specific cultures or specific periods, but propose to see this phenomenon as originating within situations of political or social upheaval, in this case one associated with the last years of the reign of Zimri-Lim.
 - 10 See above, *Introduction*, n. 104.
 - 11 John J. Collins, “Jewish Apocalyptic against its Hellenistic Near Eastern Environment,” *BASOR* 220 (1975) 27–36; Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 1998) 26–33; Collins, “Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Ancient World,” in Jerry L. Walls, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, 40–55 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 42–43. See, furthermore, John J. Collins, “From Prophecy to Apocalypticism,” in John J. Collins, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 1, *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*, 129–61 (New York: Continuum, 1999) 157. According to Eliade (*Myth of the Eternal Return*, 124–26), the idea of the recreation of the cosmos for eternity is Iranian in structure, “even if a similar eschatological vision of history was disseminated throughout the Mediterranean East and in the Roman Empire by Greco-Oriental Gnosticisms” (*ibid.*, 126). See also Schmithals, *Apocalyptic Movement*, 58, for the interest of the “history-of-religions school” in apocalyptic religion as a larger historical phenomenon encompassing currents beyond Judaism, especially Iran, Babylonia, Egypt, and Hellenism; *ibid.*, 119 which proposes an Iranian conduit even for the possible Babylonian ideas before they reach Jewish apocalyptic; and *ibid.*, 218, where the teleological way of viewing history is understood to be of Iranian origin.
 - 12 “Cosmology: Time and History,” in Sarah Iles Johnston, ed., *Religions of the Ancient World: A*

Guide, 59–70 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004) 68. On the relation between ancient Mesopotamian combat myths and the roots of apocalyptic literature, with the fundamental issues emerging seen as kingship and “divine rule over the world,” see Richard J. Clifford, S.J., “The Roots of Apocalypticism in Near Eastern Myth,” in Collins, ed., *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 1, 3–38, esp. 4, citing Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12* (*Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen. 1 und Ap. Jon 12*), trans. K. William Whitney, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2006 [1895]), which “introduced the *Urzeit* (Genesis 1) *Endzeit* (Revelation 12) equation, and demonstrated that Genesis 1 and Revelation 12 were not free compositions of their authors but adaptations of traditions from outside, ultimately from Babylonia.” In this regard, see also Murphy, *Apocalypticism*, 10–15; John J. Collins, “Genre, Ideology and Social Movements in Jewish Apocalypticism,” in John J. Collins and James H. Charlesworth, eds., *Mysteries and Revelations: Apocalyptic Studies since the Uppsala Colloquium*, 11–32, *Journal of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 9* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1991) 21, where two studies are pinpointed as stimulating contributions of the 1980s exploring “possible genetic connections between Babylonian material and *Enoch* and *Daniel*”: VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth* and Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalyptic*. A balanced treatment of the matter may also be found in Smith, “Wisdom and Apocalyptic,” which questions the idea that the apocalyptic perspective of the Hellenistic period was a reaction against foreign rule, and ascribes the phenomenon to situations characterized by the absence of a “royal patron,” in whose propaganda the basic paradigm would ordinarily have been embedded. An overview of the history of scholarship investigating the origins of the apocalyptic, with a focus on the ancient Egyptian case, can be found in Bernd Ulrich Schipper and Andreas Blasius, “Die ‘apokalyptischen’ Texte aus Ägypten: Eine Forschungsüberblick,” in A. Blasius and B. U. Schipper, eds., *Apokalyptik und Ägypten: Eine kritische Analyse der relevanten Texte aus dem griechisch-römischen Ägypten*, 7–20 (Leuven, Paris, and Sterling, VA: Peeters, 2002).

13 In this regard, see Sanders, “First Tour of Hell,” 153, which draws attention to the venue of the “Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Crown Prince,” a forerunner of the “apocalyptic genre,” as the imperial court, questioning the perception that the “roots of apocalyptic” lie exclusively among “marginalized priests and intellectuals.”

14 In Spell 1130 of the *Coffin Texts*, the speaker is Atum: “I have passed myriads of years between myself and yonder Inert One, the son of Gēb [Osiris]; I will sit with him in the one place, and mounds will be towns and towns will be mounds; mansion will desolate mansion,” translation in R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts 3: Spells 788–1185 and Indexes* (Warminster, UK: Aris and Phillips, 1978) 168. Spell 175 of the *Book of the Dead* contains a more extensive dialogue between the creator god Atum and Osiris, who asks what the duration of his life will be. Atum answers: “You shall be for millions on millions of years. I will dispatch the Elders and destroy all that I have made; the earth shall return to the Abyss, to the surging flood, as in its original state. But I will remain with Osiris, I will transform myself into something else, namely a serpent, without men knowing or the gods seeing,” translation in Raymond O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* (Austin: University of Texas Press, in cooperation with British Museum Press, 1985) 175. This passage is also quoted and discussed in Jan Bergman, “Introductory Remarks on Apocalypticism in Egypt,” in Hellholm, ed., *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World*, 51–60, esp. 56. Assmann (“La notion d’éternité,” 120–21) indicates that the two passages are actually one, being different citations of the same statement. For remarks pertaining to the ancient Egyptian “end of the world,” especially as depicted in the *Book of the Dead* (Spell 175), see further Siegfried Schott, “Altägyptische Vorstellungen vom Weltende,” *Studia Biblica et Orientalia* 3 (1959) 319–29, esp. 320; L. Kákosy, “Schöpfung und Weltuntergang in der Ägyptischen Religion,” *Acta Antiqua* 11 (1963) 17–30, esp. 28–30; Kákosy, “Ideas about the Fallen State of the World in Egyptian Religion: Decline of the Golden Age,” *Acta Orientalia* 17 (1964) 205–16, esp. 210; and Leclan, “Espace et temps,” 230.

15 See above, [Chapter 4, n. 22](#). In this regard, see also Gonzalo Rubio, “Time Before Time: Primeval

- Narratives in Early Mesopotamian Literature,” in Feliu et al., *Time and History*, 3–17, esp. 4, where the pre-creation deities and entities, especially Tiamat and Apsû, both aquatic gods, are referred to as existing “in a particular kind of time which we can call *time before time*.”
- 16 For the observation that the ancient Mesopotamian cosmos had its “final consummation” in the past in the form of the Flood, which, in turn, marked the beginning of the present, with the world having already ended in the remote past, see Foster, “End of Time,” 26.
- 17 The Egyptian question is asked in Kákosy, “Schöpfung und Weltuntergang,” 30; and Bergman, “Apocalypticism in Egypt,” 56. On ancient Egyptian conceptions of world history as an uninterrupted chain of destructions followed by renaissances, see Françoise Dunand, “L’Oracle du Potier et la formation de l’apocalyptique en Égypte,” in F. Raphaël et al., *L’Apocalyptique*, 41–67 (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1977) 60.
- 18 See Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, “Espace et temps dans l’Iran ancien,” *Revue de Synthèse* 90 (1969) 259–80, esp. 280, for the Old Iranian notion of limited or world time as cyclical as well but not revolving endlessly. After the 12,000 years allocated to it, it returns to limitless time or infinity, out of which it was created. Meanwhile, limitless time itself continues *ad infinitum*. The Zoroastrian doctrine, however, prescribes a permanent restoration of the cosmos that is never to change again at the end of such a cycle (*ibid.*, 276). Duchesne-Guillemin proposes that the two schemes, both Iranian, had to be reconciled in Zoroastrian eschatology. On Zoroastrianism’s break from the Indo-Iranian conceptions of cyclical time, see Geo Widengren, “Leitende Ideen und Quellen der iranischen Apokalyptik,” in Hellholm, ed., *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World*, 77–162, esp. 77 and 85. See, however, Prods Oktor Skjærvø, “Zarathustra: A Revolutionary Monotheist?” in Pongratz-Leisten, ed., *Revolutionary Monotheism*, 317–50, esp. 334, which posits that the distinction of the Zoroastrian religion from what came before it in the form of a distant Old Iranian and Indo-Iranian past is difficult to gauge. According to Eliade (*Myth of the Eternal Return*, 14), the Indian conceptions of cyclical time were originally centered on a single *yuga* as well; the proliferation of more extensive cycles being a later development. See, as well, Henri Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* (London and Boston, MA: Kegan Paul, 1983) 42, for the statement that the simplest scheme of cyclical time is a single cycle, its cyclicity defined by its abolishing the past and turning it into a future that is co-extensive with the origin. In contemplating the implications of the Zoroastrian restoration and the resultant eternity, Corbin (*ibid.*, 17) sees infinite time as continuing to offer the Zoroastrian celestial cosmos “the ascending movement of limitless eternities toward horizons and toward creative acts of thought belonging to the universes still in-formulable.”
- 19 “Königsdogma und Heilserwartung: Politische und kultische Chaosbeschreibungen in ägyptischen Texten,” in Hellholm, ed., *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World*, 345–77, esp. 345. See also Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XLII, presenting the analogy of the “god-born god-chosen Assyrian king” to the Egyptian pharaoh and to the Jewish Messiah; and Koenen, “Cyclic Destruction,” 23.
- 20 *Cosmos, Chaos*, 114.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 On the futility of searching for the origins of the apocalyptic in socio-political or psychological circumstances, especially on account of its ever present and supra-historical nature, see Schmithals, *Apocalyptic Movement*, 148–49. On the apocalyptic as a primarily scribal phenomenon based on internationally shared paradigms, see *ibid.*, 140 and 144.
- 23 Hornung, *Valley of the Kings*, 65.
- 24 Jan Assmann associates “salvation” with celestial radiance and the concept of the *akh*, transfigured spirit, in ancient Egyptian religion: *The Mind of Egypt: History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs*, trans. Andrew Jenkins (New York: Metropolitan Books and Henry Holt, 2002) 61.
- 25 Eliade, “Temps et l’éternité,” 246–52. In *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 267, Eliade expressed the same Indian notion in its association with the “cosmic tree.” See further *ibid.*, 274, on the necessity to cut the “cosmic tree” for the ultimate break from the cosmos; and *ibid.*, 294, for the Indian sage’s seeking an ultimate “detachment from the cosmos ... not a mere continuation in time, even an endless one.” See also Ludo Rocher, “Concepts of Time in Classical

- India,” in Rosen, ed., *Time and Temporality*, 91–110, esp. 103–4, which proposes, by virtue of Vedic Hinduism’s being “a system of escape, of liberation (*mukti* or *moksha*) from the physical world,” that “[t]ime is not endless in the Vedas.”
- 26 See Stein, “Winged Disks and Sacred Trees,” 580–81, on the winged disk as the symbol of “enlightenment” in the art of northern Mesopotamia and Syria during the Late Bronze Age.
- 27 See Muhibbe Darga, *Hitit Sanatı*, Akbank Kültür ve Sanat Kitapları (Istanbul: Akbank, 1992) 201–3, on the adoption of the winged disk by Hittite art and its replacing the Old-Hittite-period rosette at the center of the so-called Tabarna seals, which results in the aedicula composition surmounted by the winged disk, in the center of which the rosette now appears. According to Darga (*ibid.*), the first occurrence of the winged disk in the Hittite royal seal is in the reign of Arnuwanda I (ca. 1400–1350 BCE). See also Taracha, *Religions*, 89, which states that the aedicula seal expressed the tutelary role of the sun god of heaven in Hittite royal imagery from the reign of Tudhaliya III (ca. 1400–1350) onward; and *ibid.*, 89–90, n. 464, on the elevation of the sun god in Hittite lists of divine witnesses in tandem with the appearance of the winged disk and the aedicula composition.
- 28 The classic study is A. Goetze, “The Priestly Dress of the Hittite King,” *JCS* 1 (1947) 176–85. See also H. G. Güterbock, “Sungod or King?” in Machteld J. Mellink, Edith Porada, and Tahsin Özgüç, eds., *Aspects of Art and Iconography: Anatolia and its Neighbors: Studies in Honor of Nimet Özgüç*, 225–26 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1993); Taracha, *Religions*, 90.
- 29 For an overview of the Hittite royal seal types, see Ali Dinçol, “‘Tabarna’- und ‘Ädikula’-Siegel: Die Siegel hethitischer Großkönige und Großköniginnen,” in Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland GmbH, ed., *Die Hethiter und ihr Reich: Das Volk der 1000 Götter*, 87–93 (Stuttgart: Konrad Theiss, 2002). The primary publication of the royal sealings from the Hittite capital Hattusha is Thomas Beran, *Die hethitische Glyptik von Boğazköy 1: Die Siegel und Siegelabdrücke der vor- und althethitischen Perioden und die Siegel der hethitischen Grosskönige*, Boğazköy-Hattuşa 5, Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts und der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1967).
- 30 “Divine Agency and Astralization of the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in Pongratz-Leisten, ed., *Revolutionary Monotheism*, 137–87, esp. 167–69.
- 31 *Hitit Sanatı*, 172.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 See especially Simo Parpola, “The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy,” *JNES* 52 (1993) 161–208, esp. 167 and n. 31, citing previous literature.
- 34 *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 133. Along similar lines, see also Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 135.
- 35 On the identification of the solar disk in the ancient Mesopotamian visual record, see Irene J. Winter, “The Conquest of Space in Time: Three Suns on the Victory Stele of Naram-Sin,” in J. G. Derscksen, ed., *Assyria and Beyond: Studies Presented to Mogens Trolle Larsen*, 607–28 (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2004) esp. 620.
- 36 According to Van Loon (*Anatolia*, 25–26), however, this matter is a result of the assimilation of the imagery of the sun god to that of the king, rather than the other way around. This statement may not be accurate, because there are representations of non-royal priestly figures wearing similar garments in the gateway reliefs of Alacahöyük.
- 37 *Tammuz*, 130.
- 38 Darga, *Hitit Sanatı*, 107.
- 39 The reduplication of the winged disk characterizes especially the aedicula seals of the Hittite Empire of the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries that comprise “Gruppe XVII” in Beran, *Hethitische Glyptik*, 73–77 (discussion) and plates 1–4 and VII–VIII (illustrations).
- 40 “Noch einmal Iflatun Pınar,” in Mellink, Porada, and Özgüç, eds., *Aspects of Art and Iconography*, 339–55, esp. 343–44. A lucid overview of the Hittite sun deity and its formulation as male and female, and celestial and terrestrial, respectively, is found in Gary Beckman, “Under the Spell of Babylon: Mesopotamian Influence on the Religion of the Hittites,” in Aruz, Graff, and Rakic, eds., *Cultures in Contact*, 284–97, esp. 292–96.
- 41 In this respect, see Coomaraswamy, *Time and Eternity*, 15, n. 15: “The solar Self (*ātman*), transcendent and immanent, ‘is called time (*kāla*),

- who devours all existences (*bhūtāni*) as his food' (*Maitri Up.* 6.2); it is from this all devouring solar time or death that the concept of a timeless Time is a deliverance."
- 42 The initial study that made the connection between the phrase and the geographic formation is Gordon, "Meaning of the Ideogram." See also J. David Hawkins, "Hattusa: Home to the Thousand Gods of Hatti," in J. G. Westenholz, ed., *Capital Cities: Urban Planning and Spiritual Dimensions*, 65–82 (Jerusalem: Bible Land Museum, 1998) 76; Ömür Harmanşah, "'Source of the Tigris': Event, Place and Performance in the Assyrian Landscapes of the Early Iron Age," *Archaeological Dialogues* 14 (2007) 179–204, esp. 196–97. See, furthermore, Darga, *Hitit Sanatı*, 167, on holes ritually dug in the ground as media of connection with the netherworld, especially in relation to the "Sword God" of Yazılıkaya ("Shrine B") and Nergal.
- 43 Darga, *Hitit Sanatı*, 92–93.
- 44 See above, [Chapter 4](#), nn. 62–63, regarding the role of Ea and the Apsû in the myth of Ullikumi. See also Taracha, *Religions*, 126. On Hittite religion and iconography as an amalgamation of three different traditions, Mesopotamian, Syrian, and Anatolian, see Van Loon, *Anatolia*, 36.
- 45 Akurgal, *Art of the Hittites*, 83; Gary Beckman, "Mesopotamians and Mesopotamian Learning at Ḫattuša," *JCS* 35 (1983) 97–114, esp. 98, 102–3, on both direct and indirect contact with Mesopotamia; Beckman, "Under the Spell of Babylon"; Ada Taggar-Cohen, *Hittite Priesthood* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2006) 2, with emphasis on the religious traditions of the Hurrians through whom many aspects of ancient Mesopotamian culture were assimilated into the religious practices of the Hittites; *ibid.*, 6, on the occurrences in Hittite texts of several Sumerian logograms indicating roles of priesthood; Taracha, *Religions*, 80.
- 46 See Taracha, *Religions*, 135, on the roots of the Hittite cult of springs, a tradition reaching back to the Old Hittite period.
- 47 See below [n. 52](#).
- 48 On this vaulted chamber and its relief decoration, see Peter Neve, *Ḫattuša – Stadt der Götter und Tempel: Neue Ausgrabungen in der Hauptstadt der Hethiter* (Main am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1996) 69–74.
- 49 Taracha, *Religions*, 160. See also above, [n. 42](#).
- 50 For illustrations and discussion, see Darga, *Hitit Sanatı*, 109, where the ceremonial axe is seen as dating from the era of Hattushili III and Tudhaliya IV, during which there was a revitalization of the temples and a major cultic reform; *ibid.*, 174–87; Horst Ehringhaus, *Götter, Herrscher, Inschriften: Die Felsreliefs der hethitischen Grossreichszeit in der Türkei* (Mainz am Rhein: Von Zabern, 2005). More specifically on the Yazılıkaya reliefs, see, most recently, Jürgen Seeher, *Götter in Stein gehauen: Das hethitische Felsheiligtum von Yazılıkaya* (Istanbul: Ege, 2011).
- 51 "Noch einmal Iflatun Pınar," 346; and "Divine Agency and Astralization," 169, respectively.
- 52 See Darga, *Hitit Sanatı*, 181, on the entrance of mountain gods into Hittite art from the thirteenth century BCE onward, with emphasis on their origin in the Hurro-Mittanian geographic area. See Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 112, on the absence of mountain gods with vegetative features in the "classical Sumero-Akkadian cycle," and their origins in the "north of the Near East." Frankfort (*Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 228) aptly stresses the role of the mountains in Hittite art "as the specific setting of divine manifestation." He also cautions against divorcing a Hittite-Hurrian "alternative" too much from the broader ancient Mesopotamian continuum, positing that "both derive much of their repertory from one and the same source," citing as support the Mesopotamian ancestry of the mythical beings depicted at Yazılıkaya.
- 53 See above, [Chapter 2](#), n. 74.
- 54 See above, [Chapter 1](#), n. 41.
- 55 Matthews, *Principles of Organization*, 60.
- 56 Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 111–12 and pl. 236.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 112–15.
- 58 On the integration of the flowing vase with the "sacred tree" on Assyrian seals, see again above, [Chapter 1](#), n. 15. On the interchangeability of a stylized tree and a "standard with vase" in the Mittanian glyptic from Nuzi, see Porada, "Remarks," 4.
- 59 Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 342–44; Annus, "Origin of Watchers," 302.
- 60 *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 22. In this regard, see also Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return*, 12–14, where the names of the Babylonian temples are emphasized as

testifying to their “assimilation to the cosmic mountain.”

- 61 Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 112.

- 62 See above, Chapter 2, nn. 33 and 49, on the “terrestrial paradise” as a mountain in ancient Near Eastern and Judeo-Christian traditions. See further Delumeau, *History of Paradise*, 50, on Dante’s placing the “terrestrial paradise” on top of the “mountains of purgation”: “This siting of the place was shared by Ephraem, Lactantius, Pseudo-Basil, John Damascene, Bede, and Peter Lombard, all of whom located the garden of Eden on a mountain so high that the waters of the flood did not reach to it.” Interestingly enough, in the Flood story of the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh*, the gods withdraw themselves to the heaven of Anu in order not to be harmed by the Flood: “Even the gods took fright at the Deluge! / They withdrew, they went up to the heaven of Anu” (XI 114–15; George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 710–11). See also Annus, “Origin of Watchers,” esp. 279, quoting Cosmas Indicopleustes, “the wandering Nestorian monk of the sixth century CE”: “The writers of Chaldaean history, more ancient and living farther east, have mentioned in their works both the deluge and the building of the Tower, since they saw that Tower with their own eyes under the process of construction, being no doubt well aware that the men of that time, in fear of another flood, erected it for themselves as a place of refuge and safety.” Given that both the biblical sources and the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh* present the final resting place of the ark on top of a mountain, Mount Nimuš (XI 142–46), today identified with a location in the Zagros range (George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 516 and 712–13), we may be looking at a deep-seated and long-lived tradition that associated a paradisiac domain with a mountain. In this regard, see also Albright, “Mouth of the Rivers,” 190, associating the mountain on which the ark ends up after the Flood with the *pī nārāti*, “mouth of the rivers.” Another paradisiac domain, the Cedar Forest, or the “Land of the Living,” of the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh*, is also conceptualized as a mountain, the Cedar Mountain, associated with Mount Lebanon or Mount Amanus. In this regard, see Kramer, “Dilmun, the Land of the Living,” which, however, associates the Cedar

Mountain with Dilmun rather than Syria; Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 79–80; Mehmet-Ali Ataç, “‘Imaginal’ Landscapes in Assyrian Imperial Monuments,” in Jane A. Hill, Philip Jones, Antonio J. Morales, eds., *Experiencing Power, Generating Authority: Cosmos, Politics, and the Ideology of Kingship in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia*, 383–426 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). In light of the connections between the ancient Mesopotamian ziggurat and mountain, there is all the more reason to think of the idea of the mountain scale pattern and its affinity to water and streams within a hieratic cosmological framework.

- 63 Akurgal, *Art of the Hittites*, 87, refers to this image as showing “an oriental kind of apotheosis.” Van Loon, *Anatolia*, 25–26, as well views it as portraying the king after he had “become a god.”
- 64 On the cosmological significance of mountains in the religion of the Amorites, in which they were thought of as the embodiment of the netherworld or “infernal” locales, especially as exemplified by the Taurus mountains, see Durand, “Religion ammorite,” 289.
- 65 Darga, *Hittit Sanatı*, 107–9, 181–86, 201–3; van den Hout, “Tuthaliya IV,” 572–73. A form of the *ankh*, however, goes back to the Hittite Old Kingdom, appearing on the so-called Tabarna seals as a symbol of life, on which see Dinçol, “‘Tabarna’- und ‘Adikula’-Siegel,” 88.
- 66 Darga, *Hittit Sanatı*, 186; Martin Bachmann and Sirri Özenir, “Das Quellheiligtum Eflatunpınar,” *Archäologischer Anzeiger* 1 (2004) 85–122, esp. 93.
- 67 See Akurgal, *Art of the Hittites*, 86, on the Hittite state’s original aloofness from “oriental absolutism” and “the idea of the divine rights of kings,” which were “tolerated” only at the end of the Empire. On the Hittite cult reorganization of the era of Hattushili III and Tudhaliya IV, see Taggar-Cohen, *Hittite Priesthood*, 2. See furthermore Van Loon, *Anatolia*, 29; Taracha, *Religions*, 106, mentioning a group of texts testifying to the introduction of the veneration of Luwian, Hurrian, Syrian, Assyrian, and Babylonian deities in some localities in the northern Hittite territories during the reign of Tudhaliya IV. In this regard, see also Emmanuel Laroche, “La réforme religieuse du roi Tudhaliya IV et sa signification politique,” in Françoise Dunand and Pierre

- Lévêque, eds., *Les syncrétismes dans les religions de l'antiquité: Colloque de Besançon (22–23 Octobre 1973)*, 87–95 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975) 93–94; van den Hout, “Tuthalija IV,” 572–73.
- 68 van den Hout, “Tuthalija IV,” 572.
- 69 See, most recently, Gary Beckman, “The Horns of a Dilemma, or On the Divine Nature of the Hittite King,” in Gernot Wilhelm, ed., *Organization, Representation, and Symbols of Power in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 54th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Würzburg, 20–25 July 2008*, 605–10 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012).
- 70 Theo van den Hout, “Death as Privilege: The Hittite Royal Funerary Ritual,” in J. M. Bremer, Th. P. J. van den Hout, and R. Peters, eds., *Hidden Futures: Death and Immortality in Ancient Egypt, Anatolia, the Classical, Biblical and Arabic-Islamic World*, 37–75 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994) 38. See also van den Hout, “Tuthalija IV.” Whether certain Hittite royal images from the thirteenth century BCE, especially those that feature divine attributes such as the garment and headdress of the sun god and the horned crown of divinity, depict kings treated as already divine during their lifetimes or show dead and deified kings is an ongoing discussion in the study of Hittite art. For a view espousing the latter line of thought, see Ruth Mayer-Opificius, “Hethitische Kunstdenkmäler des 13. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.,” in Kutlu Emre et al., eds., *Anatolia and the Ancient Near East: Studies in Honor of Tahsin Özgüç*, 357–63 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1989) esp. 360–63, on the depiction of Hattushili III on the Fraktin rock relief. See Beckman, “Horns of a Dilemma,” for a view in harmony with the former, which is also van den Hout’s position. Somewhere in the middle is the perspective of Dominik Bonatz, “The Divine Image of the King: Religious Representation of Political Power in the Hittite Empire,” in Marlies Heinz and Marian H. Feldman, eds., *Representations of Political Power: Case Histories from Times of Change and Dissolving Order in the Ancient Near East*, 111–36 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007). On the appearance of Hattushili III and his queen in the Fraktin rock relief as deified either during their lifetime or after death, see Van Loon, *Anatolia*, 14–15.
- 71 The role of the sun as a door in the personal liberation of the “sacrificer” or the initiate in Indian thought is expressed by Coomaraswamy as follows: “whoever has thus not only been born again after repeated deaths and is duly ‘qualified to pass through the midst of the sun’ has either virtually broken out of the cosmos while still in the flesh or will for the last time be reborn at death, so as to be ‘altogether liberated through the midst of the sun’” (“Janua Coeli,” 8). Along similar lines, see Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom*, 131.
- 72 See Naydler, *Shamanic Wisdom*, 409, n. 29, on the shaman’s accessing the “supercelestial spirit realm through ‘holes’ or ‘windows’ in the sky.”
- 73 On the royal duty of the “enlargement of the borders” as “a step forward in the activity of fulfilling the world organization,” see Mario Liverani, *Prestige and Interest: International Relations in the Near East ca. 1600–1100 BCE* (Padova: sargon srl, 1990) 56. Schmithals (*Apocalyptic Movement*, 33–35) asserts that the apocalyptic is historically minded to the highest degree.
- 74 In the early days of scholarship after Petrie’s discovery of the artifact, the question was posed if the wings also encompassed a disk at the center, which would make the motif the earliest extant occurrence of the winged disk in the ancient Egyptian visual record. See Fr. W. von Bissing, “Die älteste Darstellung der geflügelten Sonnenscheibe,” *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 64 (1929) 112. Close analysis of the damaged central part of the wings, however, led to the observation “that no sun-disk ever existed between the wings,” as presented in R. Engelbach, “An Alleged Winged Sun-Disk of the First Dynasty,” *ZÄS* 65 (1930) 115–16. Worthy of remark, however, is von Bissing’s statement that the solar bark does not fly with these wings, but rather it glides over them.
- 75 For a cogent analysis of this image from the perspective of the earliest phases of the ancient Egyptian religion, see Goedicke, “Unity and Diversity,” 206, especially regarding the upper part of the composition as signaling transcendence. The image is also illustrated and discussed briefly in Kemp, *Ancient Egypt*, 85.
- 76 Goedicke, “Unity and Diversity,” 205.
- 77 Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 215. See, however, Goedicke, “Unity and Diversity,” 206, for the wings as denoting the border between transcendence, an aspect of the distant Horus, and immanence, an aspect of the permeation of the divine into

the natural sphere, especially in relation to the ruler. Goedicke sees sun god Re's traveling in the sky as a product of the theological speculation of Dynasty 2 in bridging the gap between immanence and transcendence. In this regard, see also Kemp, *Ancient Egypt*, 85, which sees Re as a translation into the horizon of Horus' original conception as a god of the sky.

78 See again Goedicke, "Unity and Diversity," 206–7, on Horus as "the distant one," "the high one," and his link with the "Absolute."

79 See Chapter 2, n. 99; *Unis* 151 and 156 in Allen, *Pyramid Texts*, 34 and 40, respectively; David O'Connor, *Abydos: Egypt's First Pharaohs and the Cult of Osiris* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009) 39. See also Naydler, *Shamanic Wisdom*, 214, on the Egyptian king's integrating both Horus and Seth only insofar as he "is able to transcend the Osirian state and enter into direct relationship with Atum, who is described as his father"; *ibid.*, 216 and 260, on the two stages of initiation detected in the *Pyramid Texts*, the first of which is the king's becoming a "living Osiris" (Utterance 219), and the second his becoming "solarized there as an *akh*"; *ibid.* 236, on the king's becoming an "awakened Osiris," which is the equivalent of a "reborn Horus"; *ibid.*, 278 on Utterance 310 from the *Pyramid Texts*, in which Unas declares himself to be Horus rather than Osiris (Naydler cites the texts according to the traditional system, found also in R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998 (1969)]). Breasted, *Development of Religion*, 142–50, addresses this matter much more explicitly than the modern standard works on ancient Egyptian religion, referring to it as Osiris' "hostility" to solar religion and the *Pyramid Texts*' "dissociating the deceased from Osiris and Horus as son of Osiris." He concludes that by the era of the *Pyramid Texts*, as an essentially terrestrial deity, Osiris had been celestialized and solarized by the priesthood of Heliopolis.

80 "Divine Agency and Astralization," 160–75; and Beate Pongratz-Leisten, "From Pictograph to Pictogram: The Solarization of Kingship in Syro-Anatolia and Assyria," in Aruz, Graff, and Rakic, eds., *Cultures in Contact*, 298–309.

81 See above, Chapter 1, n. 14; and the crucial discussion in Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 133, noting in the Assyrian representation of the "sacred tree" surmounted

by the winged disk the age-old "association of the king with the preservation and renewal of life, originally a Sumerian concept," which "found its way for the first time into Assyrian art in a formulation which it had received during the period of the Hurrian-Mitannian supremacy." His observations are paralleled in Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 135. On Assyria's taking up the imagery of the Mittanian glyptic in developing its own imperial visual vocabulary, see Stein, "Winged Disks and Sacred Trees," 599–600.

82 See Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 134, on the ancient Egyptian winged disk as a representation of Horus, "the god incarnate in Pharaoh." On the rise to special preeminence in Hatti, Assyria, and Egypt of the sun god of each culture around the same time, the Late Bronze Age, see Van De Mieroop, *Eastern Mediterranean*, 77.

83 Parpola, "Assyrian Tree of Life," 185.

84 Paul-Alain Beaulieu, "The Cult of AN. ŠĀR/Aššur in Babylonia after the Fall of the Assyrian Empire," *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 11 (1997) 55–73, esp. 64 and nn. 21–22, for the relevant references. In this regard, see also Peter Machinist, "The Assyrians and Their Babylonian Problem," *Wissenschaftskolleg Jahrbuch* (1984/85) 353–64, esp. 355.

85 Jan Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom: Re, Amun and the Crisis of Polytheism*, trans. Anthony Alcock (London and New York: Kegan Paul International; New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) 13 and 68–72. In this regard, see also Assmann, "La notion d'éternité," 119, where the concept of *djet* is associated with a divinity who is outside time, the sun-god, Amun-Re, of the post-Amarna period.

86 "Heavens and the Gods," 122.

87 On Indic conceptions of eternity, Coomaraswamy (*Time and Eternity*, 3) writes: "The metaphysical doctrine simply contrasts time as a continuum with the eternity that is not in time and so cannot properly be called *everlasting*, but coincides with the real present or now of which temporal existence is impossible." In the same article (15), Coomaraswamy cites the *Atharva Veda* 19.53 and 54, according to which "'Time' – absolutely – is the source of all relative times; not itself a duration, but rather the Timeless."

- 88 Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1948) 107. On the ancient Egyptian sense of history as a continually realized eschatology, see also Assmann, “Königsdogma,” 345.
- 89 Grayson, *Historical-Literary Texts*, 4. On the absence in ancient Mesopotamian thought of notions of eschatology given the ancient Mesopotamian conceptions of a universe and time with no end, see Edzard, “Vision du passé,” 165–66.
- 90 On the increasing transcendent characteristics of the solar religion in ancient Egypt during the Ramesside era, see Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion*, 102–55.
- 91 “Zeitliches Jenseits,” 304–305.
- 92 In this regard, see also Schweizer, *Sungod’s Journey*, 175, which points out the “eternal” time of the beyond as ultimately finite, even though it may last “millions of years.” Assmann (*Zeit und Ewigkeit*, 19 and 41), too, refers to the ancient Egyptian notions of eternity, *neheh* and *djet*, as applicable only to time within the cosmos, not outside it. Assmann, however, seems to have revised his perception of the two concepts of *djet* and *neheh* in his 2003 work (“La notion d’éternité,” 119–21), where he associates *djet* with an eternity that overrides and transcends that implied by *neheh*, in accordance with a temporality that extends beyond the destruction of the cosmos as described in the passages from the *Coffin Texts* and the *Book of the Dead*, discussed above (n. 14).
- 93 See above, n. 24.
- 94 Allen, *Pyramid Texts*, 12. On the connection among birds, especially falcons, the royal apotheosis, and stars in the Egyptian funerary religion of the Old Kingdom, see Rundle Clark, “Origin of the Phoenix 1,” 7, 11–13.
- 95 On conceptions of “astral immortality” as a way of surviving death in the fate of the individual as addressed by some of the apocalypses, see Murphy, *Apocalypticism*, 9–10.
- 96 Horowitz and Watson, “Further Notes,” 413.
- 97 See Moortgat, *Wandmalerei*, 22, on the period around 1500 BCE as a turning point in the art of the ancient Near East, with its distinctive innovation in the form of the “tree of life” surmounted by the winged disk. Moortgat (*Tammuz*, 23) refers to this configuration as the “transformation” of the age-old “tree of life” motif, and cites the seal of the Mittanian king Saushtatar, that of the Middle Assyrian king Eriba-Adad, the “sacred tree” slab from the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II, and the orthostat reliefs from Tell Halaf and Sakçegözü as the key manifestations of this novel paradigm. Pongratz-Lesiten (“Divine Agency and Astralization,” 160–75) has concentrated on the same set of images. See also Stein, “Winged Disks and Sacred Trees,” 583 and 599–600, where the motif of the tree surmounted by the winged disk is seen as the original creation and hallmark of the imagery of the northern Mesopotamian highlands, especially the territory of the Kingdom of the Mittani, during the Late Bronze Age.
- 98 *Tammuz*, 102.
- 99 For examples of Neo-Assyrian state stelae featuring these astral symbols, see Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen*, nos. 136–37, 148, 161, 163–64, 175, 203–4, 219, 232, 242.
- 100 Rochberg, *Heavenly Writing*, 188–90. For illustrations of two *kudurnus* of Melishihu II from Susa featuring this triple configuration in their upper fields, see Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, pls. 229–30. For an illustration of the stone tablet of Nabu-apla-iddina, see Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 202. For the stelae of Nabonidus, see Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen*, nos. 263–64 and 266.
- 101 *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen*, no. 26k.
- 102 “King, the Emperor, and the Empire,” 105.
- 103 “Conquest of Space in Time,” 611–21.
- 104 *Ibid.*, 620.
- 105 See Westenholz, “King, the Emperor, and the Empire,” 99.
- 106 According to Pongratz-Leisten (“Divine Agency,” 176–78), even in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, during the reign of Sennacherib, the “astralized” Assur may have absorbed the attributes of the moon god of Harran. On Nabonidus’ controversial efforts to promote the moon god Sin to the head of the pantheon, see Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556–539 B.C.*, Yale Near Eastern Researches 10 (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1989) 43–65.
- 107 See Durand, “Religion ammorite,” 552, on the use of the image of the sun to designate the Amorite king, around the same time the Hittite king was referred to as “My Sun-God,” on which, see Beckman, “‘My Sun-God.’” Remarkably, however, Durand (“Religion ammorite,” 552) notes that in the era of

Zimri-Lim, it was the image of the star that was used to address the king.

- 108 As pointed out by Eliade (*Myth of the Eternal Return*, 130), Iranian, Jewish, and Christian systems of eschatology “all have limited the duration of the cosmos to some specific number of millennia ... but even in them are traces of the ancient doctrine of the periodic regeneration of history. In other words, history can be abolished, and consequently renewed, a number of times, before the final *eschaton* is realized.” In this vein, see Marc Brettler, “Cyclical and Teleological Time in the Hebrew Bible,” in Rosen, ed., *Time and Temporality*, 11–28, which does not see notions of cyclical and teleological time as conflicting. See, also, G. R. Levy, *The Sword from the Rock: An Investigation into the Origins of Epic Literature and the Development of the Hero* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1976 [1953]) 16, for a reading of the well-known Hittite rock relief of the “sword god” of the Yazılıkaya sanctuary as its being drawn from the rock and thus symbolizing “the extrication of the hero, as champion both of gods and men, out of the impersonal ritual of cyclic recurrence which was a legacy of the stone age.”
- 109 On the notion of an ultimate moment that puts an end to history, such as “the day of Yahweh,” or the “last judgment,” as an impossible moment in time, found “in the so-called ‘adunata,’ the jestlike sayings” such as: “That happens on little Neverday,” see G. van der Leeuw, “Primordial Time and Final Time,” in Joseph Campbell, ed., *Man and Time: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, 324–50, Bollingen Series 30/3 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973 [1957]) 341, which otherwise states that “primitive” myth has prescribed no conclusion to time; “time turns round and round” (*ibid.*, 337). As such, van der Leeuw characterizes eschatology as a “stupendous idea.” Conversely, albeit structurally likewise, Schmithals (*Apocalyptic Movement*, 37) draws attention to how each “present time remains a potential end-time. The end is never pushed off into the distant future, and so the historical tension is maintained.”
- 110 *Shamanism*, 273. We can also remember Haldar’s interpretation of the upper register of the central panel of the Mari painting as Ishtar’s delivering an oracle to the king, on which see [Chapter 1](#), n. 51.

- 111 Interestingly enough, in her study of the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II, Irene Winter compared the organization of the “sacred tree” slab from this space to that of “the façade of a Gothic cathedral ... as a key to the theological structure of medieval Christianity: basal quatrefoils, as at Amiens, containing earthly didactic themes; apostles flanking the central door, as the aspiration of men; the figure of Christ on the trumeau at the middle of the central portal as the highest achievement of man; then directly above all, the scene of the Last Judgment on the tympanum, leading ultimately to an elevating visual as well as religious experience” (“The Program of the Throneroom of Ashurnasirpal II,” in Prudence O. Harper and Holly Pittman, eds., *Essays on Near Eastern Art and Archaeology in Honor of Charles Kyrle Wilkinson*, 15–31 [New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983] 16). In light of the present argument, the resemblance may not only be organizational, but also semantic, with the implications of the “Last Judgment” analogous to those of the winged disk.
- 112 The Flood’s prefiguring the “Last Judgment” is one of the most dominant themes of 1 *Enoch*, the foundational text for Jewish apocalyptic, preserved in an Ethiopic version, with fragments in Aramaic recovered among the Qumran findings, revealing the original language of the text. See Matthew Black, *The Book of Enoch, or, I Enoch: A New English Edition with Commentary and Textual Notes* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985) 8–12; Collins, “Genre, Ideology,” 25; George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *I Enoch: A New Translation: Based on the Hermeneia Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2004) 3 and 10; Murphy, *Apocalypticism*, xvii, 125–43. The Enoch tradition is seen by scholars as an important link between Babylonia and Jewish apocalyptic, especially through Enoch’s resemblance to Enmeduranki, an ancient Mesopotamian antediluvian king and the archetypal diviner. In this regard, see especially VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth*, 188. On the resemblance between Enoch’s final destiny of removal by God to some unspecified location and the removal of the Babylonian Flood Hero, see *ibid.*, 50. On the ostensible contrasts between the Enochic and Babylonian traditions, especially regarding the apparent absence

in the latter of an eschatological dimension, see *ibid.*, 66–71. Earlier on Enoch, Enmeduranki, and the antediluvian sage (*apkallu*) matched with Enmeduranki in the first-millennium BCE ritual text *bīt mēseri*, Utu’abzu, identified with Adapa, and his ascent to heaven, see Rykle Borger, “Die Beschwörungsserie *bīt mēseri* und die Himmelfahrt Henochs,” *JNES* 33 (1974) 183–96; Simo Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, State Archives of Assyria 10 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1993) XIX. A recent treatment may be found in Annus, “Origin of Watchers”; and an overview of the relevance of the Enochic tradition to ancient Mesopotamia is in Murphy, *Apocalypticism*, 126.

- 113 See, for instance, Douglas Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period (2003–1595 BCE)*, The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Early Periods 4 (Toronto, Buffalo, NY, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1990) 207, Warad-Sîn E 4.2.13.3: “May the god Nergal, his lord, rejoice at this deed, (and) may he grant a very great life-span (nam-ti u₄-maḥ-bi) (and) an eternal reign (bala-da-rí)”; 274, Rīm Sîn I E4.2.14.2: “On account of this may the goddess Inanna, lady of heaven and earth, rejoice at them, and determine in the midst of the great gods a destiny for them – life with exalted days, long years, a firm reign (bala-gi-na) that makes the nation peaceful, (and) the exercise of kingship forever (nam-lugal du-rí-šè)”; 378, Samsu-iluna E4.3.7.3: “On account of this the god Šamaš, who exalts his kingship, gave to him as a gift life, everlasting happiness, kingship that has no rival, a scepter of justice that makes the land firm, a mighty weapon that wipes out the enemies, (and) the rule of the four quarters forever (*be-lu-ut ki-ib-ra-at ar-ba-im a-na da-ar e-pé-ša-am*).” Similar statements are also found in *Ashurbanipal’s Coronation Hymn* (Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, 26–27). For definitions of the Akkadian words for “eternity” and related concepts, see Gelb et al., eds., *Assyrian Dictionary*, s.v. esp. *dār*, *dārātu*, *dāriš*, *dārī*, meaning ever, eternity, forever, everlasting, respectively. On conceptions of immortality and eternity in association with kingship and an understanding of a length of reign or life on a par with that of the gods, as expressed especially in the phrase *u’ulli’eše* (Sumerian) / *ana ūmī šāti*, *ana šāt ūmī* (Akkadian), meaning “until the day of going out” or “until the

going out of days,” see Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, 8. In this regard, see also Glassner, “Historical Times in Mesopotamia,” 197–201.

- 114 On the occurrence of the phrase “forever” in such texts as a cliché, see Foster, “End of Time,” 26. For a discussion of similar “promises of long life and everlasting days and of a lasting dynasty at both Mari and Nineveh,” see Robert P. Gordon, “Prophecy in the Mari and Nineveh Archives,” in Robert P. Gordon and Hans M. Barstad, eds., “*Thus Speaks Ishtar of Arbela*: Prophecy in Israel, Assyria, and Egypt in the Neo-Assyrian Period, 37–57 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013) 51–53, where this phenomenon is rightly seen as much more than a cliché, and pointed out as “something approaching a proto-messianism.” In this regard, Gordon cites J. G. Heintz, “Langage prophétique at ‘style de cour’ selon *Archives Royales de Mari X* et l’Ancien Testament,” *Sem* 22 (1972) 5–12. Gordon (“Prophecy in the Mari and Nineveh Archives,” 53) concludes that the “‘messianism’ of the Old Testament is paralleled in some degree in the prophetic texts from Mari and Nineveh.”
- 115 In the ancient Near East, outside Jewish apocalyptic, the only unequivocal example of the ultimate renewal of the cosmos is found in Zoroastrianism, which is often understood as an original invention or revolution, breaking away radically from the age-old ancient Near Eastern and Indo-Iranian conceptions of a world without *terminus*. See above, n. 11, and furthermore, Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos*, 231; Philip G. Kreyenbrock, “Millennialism and Eschatology in the Zoroastrian Tradition,” in Amanat and Bernhardsson, eds., *Imagining the End*, 33–55, esp. 55. The written sources for Zoroastrian apocalyptic are primarily from the ninth–tenth centuries CE in the form of Middle Iranian or Pahlavi texts. Many scholars assume, nevertheless, a common ancient Avestan background to these later compilations, especially on the basis of linguistic character. See, for instance, Anders Hultgård, “Forms and Origins of Iranian Apocalypticism,” in Hellholm, ed., *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World*, 387–411, esp. 391–92, and 407, pointing out as an important clue Plutarch’s *De Iside et Osiride* (46–47), which gives “a brief account of Iranian apocalypticism in its zervanite version where the structure of the Middle Iranian scheme is clearly reflected.” Plutarch

- (ca. 45–ca. 125 CE) bases his account on the evidence of Theopompus, who was born in 376 BCE (Kreyenbrock, “Millennialism and Eschatology,” 50). See also Alan Williams, “The Theological Significance of Dualism in the Three Times of Zoroastrian Eschatology,” in Barton et al., eds., *Zeit und Ewigkeit*, 53–66, esp. 54–56, referring to Mary Boyce’s conviction that there is continuity in the Zoroastrian religious tradition from the time of the prophet Zarathustra down to recent times. The Zoroastrian renovation of the world, Middle Persian *Frashegird*, Avestan *Frasho-kerti*, meaning “making wonderful (*frasha*),” is clearly laid out in *Yasht* 19.89: “...the Victorious One among the Saoshyants [Saviors] and also his other companions, so that they may make the world perfect, unchanging, undying, uncorrupted, undecaying, ever-living, ever-growing...” (quoted in Kreyenbrock, “Millennialism and Eschatology,” 46). Cohn (*Cosmos, Chaos*, 114) posits that in Zoroastrian eschatology, the classic ancient Near Eastern combat myth was transformed into a “more potent” one resulting in a final and total victory and an incorruptible world. Cohn (*ibid.*, 105) also asks the question if this world view was a “thoroughly intellectualised and spiritualised” novel version of the combat myth. One again wonders if this eschatological perspective was equally part of the lore of the ancient Near East, perhaps already embedded in the mainstream traditions as a much more restricted idea, on which the Zoroastrian speculation drew, among other sources.
- 116 vv. 366–69, translation in Piotr Michalowski, *The Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989) 58–59; cited in Edzard, “Vision du passé,” 161–62.
- 117 On the idea of defying the cycle of change as seen also in royal inscriptions and hymns, with a view “that the current king has earned his position and may keep it indefinitely,” see Cooper, “Mesopotamian Historical Consciousness,” 40.
- 118 Murphy (*Apocalypticism*, 9) states that even though apocalypses typically give a sense of the time remaining to the end, “it is almost always vague.”
- 119 On this reading of the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II, see Ataç, “Time and Eternity.”
- 120 See above, n. 73.
- 121 See Eliade, “Temps et l’éternité,” 238, on the non-applicability of the irreversibility of time to the Buddha, who himself is out of time but not only knows the past but also the future. See also Assmann, *Zeit und Ewigkeit*, 14, on how for the wise knowing the future is not about knowing this-worldly future, but the temporality of the beyond.
- 122 On knowledge of the past, present, and future in association with direct access to the beyond on the part of the poet and the diviner in ancient Greece, see Marcel Detienne, *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1996) 15–16; and 24–25, in relation to Apollo and the Muses.
- 123 See George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 509–10 and 704–5.
- 124 Alan Lenzi, *Secrecy and the Gods*, 51–52.
- 125 “I will disclose to you, Gilgameš, a secret matter, / and I will tell you a mystery of the gods” (George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 702–3).
- 126 Schmithals, *Apocalyptic Movement*, 213–15.
- 127 Murphy, *Apocalypticism*, xvii, stressing that the New Testament is “heavily influenced by apocalypticism throughout.”
- 128 Schmithals, *Apocalyptic Movement*, 13.
- 129 Schmithals (*ibid.*, 18) also sees understanding the future in terms of the past as crucial in the apocalyptic perspective.
- 130 Parpola (*Assyrian Prophecies*, XLVIII) underscores the continuum in prophecy in ancient Mesopotamia as an indigenous phenomenon, rather than one borrowed from a foreign source, proposing a chronological background for the Neo-Assyrian evidence in the Middle Assyrian period, which, “in turn, has a prehistory reaching back, through Mari prophecy, to the early second millennium BC and even beyond.” He points out that “[t]he earliest reference to a prophetic oracle of Ištar seems to occur in an Old Akkadian text dating to the reign of Naram-Suen.” He sees the cult of Ishtar, with its roots in that of the Sumerian Inanna, and its ecstatic qualities as aspects of “an esoteric mystery cult promising its devotees transcendental salvation and eternal life” (*ibid.*, XV–XVI). In fact, one of the prophecies addressed to Zimri-Lim of Mari included in Foster’s anthology, *Before the Muses*, 146, is from Ishtar of Nineveh. On the role and influence of Ishtar of Nineveh in the second-millennium states of northern Mesopotamia

and Anatolia, see Gary Beckman, “Ištar of Nineveh Reconsidered,” *JCS* 50 (1998) 1–10, although with no mention of Mari. Bridging Old Babylonian Mari with the Neo-Assyrian period is also the Middle Assyrian administrative text from Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, mentioned by Villard (Prophéties, 55; see above, Chapter 1, n. 25), recording food rations for the male and female ecstasies (*mahlû* and *mahlûtu*) attached to the temple of Ishtar.

6 THE “ROYAL DESTINY”: THE “GARDEN SCENE” OF ASHURBANIPAL REVISITED

This chapter is a revised and expanded version of my contribution, “‘The Charms of Tyranny’: Conceptions of Power in the ‘Garden Scene’ of Ashurbanipal Reconsidered,” in Wilhelm, ed., *Organization, Representation, and Symbols of Power*, 411–28.

1 133–36.

2 *Tammuz*, 131–42.

3 *Ibid.*, 142.

4 Ataç, “Changing Approaches.”

5 On the identification of this figure as the Assyrian queen and her affinity with Ishtar, see Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace*, 56; Jutta Börker-Klähn, “Mauerkronenträgerinnen,” in Hartmut Waetzoldt and Harald Hauptmann, eds., *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten: XXXIX^e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Heidelberg 6.–10. Juli 1992*, 227–34, Heidelberg Studien zum Alten Orient 6 (Heidelberg: Heidelberg Orientverlag, 1997) 228; Christl M. Maier, “Daughter Zion as Queen and the Iconography of the Female City,” in Nissinen and Carter, eds., *Images and Prophecy*, 147–62, esp. 149–50. On the affinity of the enthroned female figure with Ishtar, see also Margaret Cool Root, “Elam in the Imperial Imagination: From Nineveh to Persepolis,” in Javier Alvarez-Mon and Mark B. Garrison, eds., *Elam and Persia*, 419–74 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011) 449.

6 On the circumstances in which the slabs presumably fallen from Room S were found, see Pauline Albenda, “Landscape Bas-Reliefs in the *Bīt-Ḫilāni* of Ashurbanipal,” *BASOR* 224 (1976) 49–72, esp. 49; Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace*, 53–54. Among the subjects found on these fallen slabs are also the so-called small lion hunt series (Albenda, “Landscape Bas-Reliefs,” 56; Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace*, 54).

7 For a rendition combining the drawings of individual slabs, first reassembled in C. J. Gadd, *The Stones of Assyria: The Survey Remains of Assyrian Sculpture: Their Recovery and Original Positions* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1936) 193–94, pls. 39–42, see Albenda, “Landscape Bas-Reliefs,” pl. 1; and Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace*, pl. LXIII.

8 Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace*, 19. The original location of the slabs on the upper level, however, is entirely unknown (Albenda, “Landscape Bas-Reliefs,” 55).

9 Albenda, “Landscape Bas-Reliefs,” 61 and 67. See also Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace*, 56; Paul Collins, “The Symbolic Landscape of Ashurbanipal,” *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 23 (2004) 1–6, esp. 2. On Libbali-sharrat, whose name was rendered as Ashur-sharrat in the older literature, see C. Ambos, “Libbāli-šarrat,” in Heather D. Baker, ed., *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, vol. 11, 660–61 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001).

10 On the alternation of the conifer and the date palm in a number of the landscape scenes of Ashurbanipal, including the “Garden Scene,” see Albenda, “Landscape Bas-Reliefs,” 61; Paul Collins, “Trees and Gender in Assyrian Art,” *Iraq* 68 (2006) 99–107.

11 Collins, “Symbolic Landscape,” 2.

12 Barnett (*Sculptures from the North Palace*, 57) has the following translation: “(whose) good (deeds?) they (i.e. the gods) love, all the princes of the whole ... / the kings of Elam, whom with the aid of Ashur and Ninlil my hands captured ... / they stood (?), and their own hands prepared the royal meal, and they brought it in before me (Streck, A. L. A. K. III, p. 837, ζ).”

13 For a historical overview of Ashurbanipal’s numerous battles against the Elamites, see Pauline Albenda, “Landscape Bas-Reliefs in the *Bīt-Ḫilāni* of Ashurbanipal,” continued from *BASOR* 224: 49–72, *BASOR* 225 (1977) 29–48, esp. 30–31; Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East: c. 3000–330 BC* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998 [1995]) vol. 11, 500–1.

14 Albenda, “Landscape Bas-Reliefs,” 62; Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace*, 56–57.

15 Daniel David Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, vol. 11, *Historical Records of Assyria from Sargon to the End* (Chicago: The University Press, 1927) nos. 865, 1041,

- 1047, 1071. For an analysis of the corpus of Ashurbanipal epigraphs found on his relief slabs, see John Malcolm Russell, *The Writing on the Wall: Studies in the Architectural Context of Late Assyrian Palace Inscriptions* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999) 154–209, esp. 158–64, including a chart featuring a complete sequence, chronological reconstruction, and translation of the surviving epigraphs dealing with the battle against Teumman and the victory celebrations that ensue. A decapitated head, perhaps also that of Teumman, appears in a series of reliefs from Room 1 of the North Palace of Ashurbanipal showing what may be an alternative version of the Battle of Til Tuba on the River Ulai. The upper register shows Ashurbanipal's triumphal procession advancing to the right to enter a walled city, which may be Arbela, with a temple standing on top of it. The king may be shown here in a ritual act in front of a pair of standards, beneath which lies the decapitated head (Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace*, 42; for illustrations, see *ibid.*, 15 and pl. XXV). The Ashurbanipal inscriptions mentioning the severed head are also highlighted in Bahrani, *Rituals of War*, 39–50.
- 16 Albenda, "Landscape Bas-Reliefs," continued from *BASOR* 224, 29. The epigraph on the decapitation scene reads: "Teumman, king of Elam, who was wounded in the great battle, (and) Tammaritu, his oldest son, who held him by the hand, fled to save their lives (and) hid themselves in the woods. With the aid of Ashur and Ishtar I slew them and cut off their heads, one in front of the other" (Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, vol. II, no. 1029). See also Russell, *Writing on the Wall*, 170–71.
- 17 "Landscape Bas-Reliefs," continued from *BASOR* 224, 31.
- 18 Analyzing the representations of the weapons in relation to comparanda, Albenda concludes that they may be of Babylonian or Elamite origin ("Landscape Bas-Reliefs," continued from *BASOR* 224, 38). Barnett (*Sculptures from the North Palace*, 56) identifies them as the weapons of Teumman. The weapons are considered to be Ashurbanipal's in Reade, *Assyrian Sculpture*, 65; and Dominique Collon, *Ancient Near Eastern Art* (London: The British Museum, 1995) 151.
- 19 Albenda, "Landscape Bas-Reliefs," continued from *BASOR* 224, 36. On the military campaigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal to Egypt, see also Kuhrt, *Ancient Near East*, vol. II, 499–500, 634–36.
- 20 "Landscape Bas-Reliefs," continued from *BASOR* 224, 31.
- 21 On the likely identification of the figure on Esarhaddon's bronze plaque as Naqi'a, see André Parrot and Jean Nougayrol, "Asarhaddon et Naqi'a sur un bronze du Louvre (AO 20,185)," *Syria* 33 (1956) 147–60; Reade, "Was Sennacherib a Feminist?" 144. On both images, the Esarhaddon plaque and the Assur stela, see also Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen*, nos. 220 and 227, respectively; Sherry-Lou Macgregor, *Beyond Hearth and Home: Women in the Public Sphere in Neo-Assyrian Society*, State Archives of Assyria Studies 5 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2012) 88–89 and 109–18, respectively. This small corpus of female royal figures wearing the mural crown is also treated in P. Calmeyer, "Mauerkrone," *RLA* 7 (1987–90) 595–96.
- 22 "Ashurbanipal Banqueting with His Queen? Wer thront bei Assurbanipal in der Weinlaube?" *Mesopotamia: Rivista di Archeologia, Epigrafia e Storia Orientale Antica* 32 (1997) 289–308.
- 23 "Elam in the Imperial Imagination," 450–52, citing Ernst Herzfeld, *The Persian Empire: Studies in Geography and Ethnography of the Ancient Near East*, Edited from the Posthumous Papers by Gerold Walser (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1968) 265–66.
- 24 In this respect, see Macgregor, *Beyond Hearth and Home*, 87–88; David Kertai, "The Queens of the Neo-Assyrian Empire," *Altorientalische Forschungen* 40 (2013) 108–24, esp. 109–10 and 119. See, however, Root, "Elam in the Imperial Imagination," 150, noting that there is no join between the fragments of the inscription and the other remains of the stela.
- 25 "Landscape Bas-Reliefs," continued from *BASOR* 224, 45. In this regard, see Reade, *Assyrian Sculpture*, 65–66, which also sees a statement of success and celebration in this scene.
- 26 "Elam in the Imperial Imagination," 445–53.
- 27 Albenda, "Landscape Bas-Reliefs," continued from *BASOR* 224, 31.
- 28 "Trees and Gender," 101–2. On Assur Tomb 45, which may date around the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I and the luxury objects found in it, see W. Andrae, "Gruft 45 Ass. 14630," in Arndt Haller, ed., *Die Gräber und Gräfte von*

- Assur (Berlin: Verlag Gebr. Mann, 1954) 123–47; Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 115; Marian H. Feldman, “Assur Tomb 45 and the Birth of the Assyrian Empire,” *BASOR* 343 (2006) 21–43, esp. 25.
- 29 Collins, “Trees and Gender,” 102. On this relief, see also Root, “Elam in the Imperial Imagination,” 447, drawing attention to the correlation between the sexual pairing of the lions and the royal couple in the “Garden Scene.”
- 30 Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace*, 38–39.
- 31 Pauline Albenda, “Grapevines in Ashurbanipal’s Garden,” *BASOR* 215 (1974) 5–17.
- 32 For a discussion of the geographic affiliations of the conifer and the date palm in ancient Mesopotamia and Elam, see Collins, “Symbolic Landscape,” 2.
- 33 The creation of such botanical gardens is described in the inscriptions of certain Neo-Assyrian kings, especially Ashurnasirpal II and Sennacherib. See, for instance, A. Kirk Grayson, *The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Assyrian Periods 2: Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC 1* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991) Ashurnasirpal II A.O.101.30, ll. 36b–52; A. Kirk Grayson and Jamie Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC), Part 1*, The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 3/1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012) Sennacherib 1, ll. 87–90; 3, ll. 57–60; 17.7, ll. 53–57; 17.8, ll. 16–30; and ll. 46–59; A. Kirk Grayson and Jamie Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC), Part 2*, The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 3/2 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014) Sennacherib 43, ll. 93b–96a; 223, ll. 18b–23a. See also Collins, “Symbolic Landscape,” 3; Allison Karmel Thomason, *Luxury and Legitimation: Royal Collecting in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2005) 169–87. For the philosophical implications of these gardens and their representations in Assyria, see also Ataç, “Imaginal Landscapes.”
- 34 See above, n. 33, the examples cited in Grayson and Novotny, *Inscriptions of Sennacherib*, esp. Sennacherib 1, 3, 17, 223.
- 35 On the North Syrian background of Neo-Assyrian art and landscapes, see Irene J. Winter, “Art as Evidence for Interaction: Relations between the Assyrian Empire and North Syria,” in Hans-Jörg Nissen and Johannes Renger, eds., *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn: Politische und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen im Alten Vorderasien vom 4. Bis 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr. XXV: Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Berlin*, 355–82 (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1982); Allison Karmel Thomason, “Representations of the North Syrian Landscape in Neo-Assyrian Art,” *BASOR* 323 (2001) 63–96; Thomason, *Luxury and Legitimation*, 169–87.
- 36 Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi’ite Iran*, trans. Nancy Pearson, Bollingen Series 91/2 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977) 20–21; Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace*, 12. On ancient Persian gardens, see David Stronach, “The Royal Garden at Pasargadae: Evolution and Legacy,” in L. de Meyer and E. Haernick, eds., *Archaeologia Iranica et Orientalis: Miscellanea in Honorem Louis Vanden Berghe*, vol. 1, 475–502 (Gent: Peeters, 1989); Stronach, “The Garden as a Political Statement: Some Case Studies from the Near East in the First Millennium B.C.,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, New Series 4 (1990) 171–80. Further on gardens in ancient Mesopotamia, see A. Leo Oppenheim, “On Royal Gardens in Mesopotamia,” *JNES* 24 (1965) 328–333; D. J. Wiseman, “Mesopotamian Gardens,” *Anatolian Studies* 33 (1983) 137–44.
- 37 The paradisiac connotations of the “Garden Scene” are acknowledged in David Stronach, “The Imagery of the Wine Bowl: Wine in Assyria in the Early First Millennium,” in Patrick E. McGovern, Stuart J. Fleming, and Solomon H. Katz, eds., *The Origins and Ancient History of Wine*, 175–95 (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 1995) 189; and further in Börker-Klähn, “Mauerkronenträgerinnen,” 228, which also stresses that textual evidence is not absent to that effect, citing references to a “steppe house/palace”, É.GAL EDIN, of Ishtar at Milqia, the location of the *akitu* in Arbela, renovated by Ashurbanipal, EDIN possibly being a prototype of the notion of paradise or the biblical garden of Eden; as well as to a festival largely related to Ishtar of Arbela, which in part took place in a garden outside the city. On the role of Milqia in the cultic life of Arbela, see also Martti Nissinen, “City as Lofty as Heaven: Arbela and Other Cities in Neo-Assyrian Prophecy,” in Lester L. Grabbe and Robert D. Haak, eds., “Every City Shall Be Forsaken”: *Urbanism and Prophecy*

- in *Ancient Israel and the Near East*, 172–209, *Journal of the Study of the Old Testament Series* 330 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 2001) 183–86.
- 38 Albenda, “Grapevines,” 6.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 40 Even though in ancient Mesopotamia beer was much more common than wine, the latter was certainly available in Assyria. Wine was an expensive and rare commodity, and produced “in areas of natural rainfall in the highlands” (Karen Rhea Nemet-Nejat, *Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*, The Greenwood Press “Daily Life Through History” [Wesport, CT and London: Greenwood, 1998] 158). On the availability of the vine and wine in ancient Mesopotamia and wine’s being a much more prized and rare commodity than beer, see Stronach, “Imagery of the Wine Bowl,” 177; Marvin A. Powell, “Wine and the Vine in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Cuneiform Evidence,” in McGovern, Fleming, and Katz, eds., *Origins and Ancient History*, 97–122, with emphasis on Syria as a source of diffusion of wine culture in ancient Mesopotamia, especially Assyria. In the eighth century BCE, tablets from Nimrud, known also as the “Nimrud Wine Lists,” document wine rations to members of the royal household. The primary study of these texts is J. V. Kinnier-Wilson, *The Nimrud Wine Lists: A Study of Men and Administration at the Assyrian Capital in the Eighth Century B.C.* (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 1972). The Nimrud wine rations were allotted to the queen, musicians, and Egyptians. The king most likely had his own wine cellar at the Northwest Palace. Earlier than the Nimrud Wine Lists, the “Banquet Stela” of Ashurnasirpal II mentions 10,000 skins of wine, and a wine cellar (SW 6) was identified in Fort Shalmaneser at Nimrud. On matters related to wine at Nimrud, see also Joan Oates and David Oates, *Nimrud: An Assyrian Imperial City Revealed* (London: The British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 2001) 41, 164, 166, 196, 201, 213–15.
- 41 See Widengren, *King and the Tree of Life*, 38–39, on the differences in tradition “as to the botanical species of the Tree of Life in the Israelite Paradise. Some of the rabbis held it to be a date palm, others the olive, and even the fig tree had its advocates. Presumably the vine too must have been held to be this tree, for only do we understand that the sceptre from the Tree of Paradise may be either a twig from the olive or the vine.” Widengren (*ibid.*, 7) also points out the fantastic orchard visited by Gilgamesh on his quest for the Flood Hero as containing vine grapes hanging from the tree: “A carnelian (tree) was in fruit, / hung with bunches of grapes, lovely to behold” (IX 173–74; George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vol. 1, 672–73).
- 42 *The King and the Tree of Life*, 20–41, including a discussion on how the king also gives life to his subjects through his possession of the plant of life, and the discussion on the manner in which one partakes of this plant, such as eating or smelling. See also above, [Chapter 3](#), n. 68, for the study by McDonald on the Assyrian tree and its ornamental offshoots as derived from the lotus and its various aspects rather than the date palm. As already stated, Ashurbanipal, although perhaps not the queen, is shown here holding a lotus blossom.
- 43 On the possible Syro-Phoenician roots of the Neo-Assyrian royal banquet scene, including the presence of the royal consort at the banquet, see also Tallay Ornan, “The Queen in Public: Royal Women in Neo-Assyrian Art,” in S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting, eds., *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 47th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki, July 2–6, 2001*, vol. II, 461–77 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2002) 473–77.
- 44 R. D. Barnett, *The Sculptures of Aššur-našir-apli II (883–859 B.C.), Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 B.C.), Esarhaddon (681–669 B.C.) from the Central and South-West Palaces at Nimrud* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1962) pl. XIX; Winter, “Art as Evidence for Interaction,” 366 and n. 82.
- 45 Dennis Pardee, “A New Aramaic Inscription from Zincirli,” *BASOR* 356 (2009) 51–71, esp. 53–54 for a transliteration and translation.
- 46 Seth L. Sanders, “The Appetites of the Dead: West Semitic Linguistic and Ritual Aspects of the Katumuwa Stele,” *BASOR* 369 (2013) 35–55, esp. 47.
- 47 For an analysis of the imagery of the Zincirli stela within the framework of the banquet scene in the ancient Near East of the Iron Age, the relevant illustrations, and further bibliography, see Eudora J. Struble and Virginia Rimmer Herrmann, “An Eternal Feast at Sam’al: The New Iron Age Mortuary Stele

- from Zincirli in Context,” *BASOR* 356 (2009) 15–49. A recent study reconsidering the philological and archaeological aspects and contexts of the Zincirli stela is Sanders, “Appetites of the Dead.” Most recently on this stela, its archaeological context, and its ritual and iconographic implications, see the various essays in the exhibition catalogue, Virginia Rimmer Herrmann and J. David Schloen, eds., *In Remembrance of Me: Feasting with the Dead in the Ancient Middle East*, Oriental Institute Museum Publications 37 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2014). The comprehensive study on the Syro-Hittite funerary stelae and the iconography of the banquet scene is Dominik Bonatz, *Das syro-hethitische Grabdenkmal: Untersuchungen zur Entstehung einer neuen Bildgattung in der Eisenzeit im nordsyrisch-südostanatolischen Raum* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2000) esp. 63, which acknowledges the connection between Ashurbanipal’s “Garden Party” and the Syro-Hittite banquet scene, pointing out how the Assyrian relief composition is embedded in a narrative or historical framework, in that it addresses the aftermath of a battle; and 100–2, on the lotus or the flower blossom as connected with regeneration. A more detailed treatment of Syro-Hittite banquet reliefs of the Iron Age goes beyond the scope of the present study.
- 48 *King and the Tree of Life*, 35–36.
- 49 In this regard, see Macgregor, *Beyond Hearth and Home*, 92.
- 50 Janusz Meuszyński, *Die Rekonstruktion der Reliefdarstellungen und ihrer Anordnung im Nordwestpalast von Kalhu (Nimrūd)* (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1981) pls. 8–9, illustrating the reliefs from Room G.
- 51 For an illustration, see Paul Collins, *Assyrian Palace Sculptures* (London: The British Museum Press, 2008) 134–35. The Hunting Epigraph E: 3c reads: “I have poured out wine over them (=the lions which I have killed) (*karānu aqqā elišun*),” quoted in Elnathan Weissert, “Royal Hunt and Royal Triumph in a Prism Fragment of Ashurbanipal (82–5–22,2),” in Parpola and Whiting, eds., *Assyria 1995*, 339–58, esp. 352.
- 52 Room G, Panels 2–4; for an illustration focusing on the king, see Collins, *Assyrian Palace Sculptures*, 53. On the priestly implications of the bowl held by the king and their resonance in Ashurbanipal’s “Garden Scene,” see again Ornan, “Queen in Public,” 474. On the interplay between the bowl and weapons held by the king alternatively or together and their priestly and military implications, see also M. A. Brandes, “La Salle dite ‘G’ du palais d’Assurnasirpal II à Kalakh, lieu de cérémonie rituelle,” in André Finet, ed., *Actes de la XVII^e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 30 juin–4 juillet 1969*, 147–54 (Ham-sur-Heure: Comité belge de recherches en Mésopotamie, 1970); Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, 96–112.
- 53 Such is also the reading of the scene in Stronach, “Imagery of the Wine Bowl,” 177.
- 54 Christine Meyer, “Wein G. Religion,” *RLA* 6 (1986) 1169–82, esp. 1175–77, including a discussion of the visual record.
- 55 “Janua Coeli,” 76 and 94.
- 56 Almost all aspects of winemaking are depicted in New Kingdom Theban tomb scenes, on which, see Leonard H. Lesko, “Egyptian Wine Production During the New Kingdom,” in McGovern, Fleming, and Katz, eds., *Origins and Ancient History*, 215–30, esp. 215–19.
- 57 On the presence of Egyptian scholars in the Assyrian court in the seventh century BCE, see Parpola, *Letters*, XIV; and XXXIV, n. 4. Another view is indicated in Collins, “Symbolic Landscape,” where the grapevine canopy is seen as an import from Elamite rather than Egyptian art. The same view is espoused by Root, “Elam in the Imperial Imagination,” 449 and n. 104, in arguing for allusions to the Assyrian incorporation of Elam as permeating the relief.
- 58 Oates and Oates, *Nimrud*, 84.
- 59 For an overview of the Nimrud tombs and their finds, see Oates and Oates, *Nimrud*, 78–90, esp. 84–88 for Tomb III; Muayyad Said Damerji, “An Introduction to the Nimrud Tombs,” in J. E. Curtis et al., eds., *New Light on Nimrud: Proceedings of the Nimrud Conference, 11th–13th March 2002*, 81–82 (London: British Institute for the Study of Iraq in association with The British Museum, 2008). More specifically on this crown, see Dominique Collon, ed., “Nimrud Treasures: Panel Discussion,” in Curtis et al., ed., *New Light on Nimrud*, 105–18, esp. 105–6. Oates and Oates, *Nimrud*, is more informative on the tombs than the Nimrud Conference volume.
- 60 Amy R. Gansell, “Women in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillon, eds., *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, 11–24 (Malden, MA: Blackwell,

- 2012) 20. For excellent illustrations, see Curtis et al., eds., *New Light on Nimrud*, pls. 5–6.
- 61 The epigraphic evidence from the antechamber burials is concentrated on the late ninth and early eighth centuries, pointing to a date before Sennacherib. The burials, however, have all been identified as secondary. See again the discussion in Oates and Oates, *Nimrud*, 86–87.
- 62 Albenda, “Grapevines,” 10. For an interpretation of the imagery of the İvriz rock-relief, see Mustafa Şahin, “Neue Beobachtungen zum Felsrelief von İvriz/Konya: Nicht in den Krieg, sondern zur Ernte: der Gott mit der Sichel,” *Anatolian Studies* 49 (1999) 165–76.
- 63 (Baltimore, MD and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990) 274–313.
- 64 Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace*, 20; Collon, *Ancient Near Eastern Art*, 151. A recent study of the Archaic Greek symposium scenes that challenges this thought is Kathryn Topper, “Primitive Life and the Construction of the Sympotic Past in Athenian Vase Painting,” *AJA* 113 (2009) 3–26.
- 65 Giovanni B. Lanfranchi, “The Ideological and Political Impact of the Assyrian Imperial Expansion on the Greek World in the 8th and 7th centuries BC,” in Aro and Whiting, eds., *Heirs of Assyria*, 7–34; Walter Burkert, *Babylon, Memphis, Persepolis: Eastern Contexts of Greek Culture* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004) 7–8; and Van Loon, *Anatolia*, 36, with an emphasis on the “Syro-Anatolian border area ... that so enriched Greek art and mythology in the 8th century B.C.” Most recently, for the key role of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in triggering contact between the Greek world and the Near East, see Ann C. Gunter, *Greek Art and the Orient* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- 66 *Pindar’s Homer*, 31.
- 67 On the ancient Mesopotamian antediluvian tradition, see especially Erica Reiner, “The Etiological Myth of the Seven Sages,” *Orientalia* 30 (1961) 1–11; W. G. Lambert, “A Catalogue of Text and Authors,” *JCS* 16 (1962) 59–77, esp. 72–77; Stanley Mayer Burstein, *The Babyloniaca of Berossus*, Sources and Monographs, Sources from the Ancient Near East 1, Fascicle 5 (Malibu, CA: Undena Publications, 1978) esp. 6–8, 20–21; Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalyptic*, 159–213. On representations of the *apkallus* in the Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs, see Dieter Kolbe, *Die Relieffprogramme religiös-mythologischen Charakters in neuassyrischen Palästen: Die Figurentypen, ihre Benennung und Bedeutung* (Bern and Frankfurt am Main: Peter D. Lang, 1981) esp. 14–15; Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits*, 73–76; Parpola, *Letters*, esp. XVIII; Russell, “Program of the Palace,” 674; Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*.
- 68 For the idea of a primarily internal audience for the Neo-Assyrian Palace reliefs, see Luc Bachelot, “La fonction politique des reliefs néo-assyriens,” in D. Charpin and F. Joannès, eds., *Marchands, diplomates et empereurs: Études sur la civilisation mésopotamienne offertes à Paul Garelli*, 109–28 (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1991). Russell has considered a gradation of access to the palace whereby some of the relief scenes would have been viewed and understood by a “general audience” and some “more esoteric subjects ... would probably only have been fully understood by the king and his court” (“Program of the Palace,” 665).
- 69 Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer*, 274–313.
- 70 *Ibid.*, 146–52.
- 71 Marc Van De Mieroop, *Cuneiform Texts and the Writing of History* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 57. On the overlap between “hymnic” and “epic” genres in the royal inscriptions in the Middle Assyrian period, see Peter Machinist, “Literature as Politics: The Tukulti-Ninurta Epic and the Bible,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 38 (1976) 455–82, esp. 455–68.
- 72 *Pindar’s Homer*, 276–77, 283, 287.
- 73 Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 172; *Hymn to Demeter*, 480.
- 74 Herodotus, *Histories* 1.87.1–2; Bacchylides, *Epinician* 3.29–35, 48–51, 53–56; Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer*, 275–77.
- 75 Bacchylides, *Epinician* 3.58–60; Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer*, 277. On the Hyperborean as a land of “moral purity and festive way of life,” see also James S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992) 60–67.
- 76 Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, vol. II, no. 784.
- 77 On the Phrygian contact with the Neo-Assyrian Empire and its implications, see Lanfranchi, “Ideological and Political Impact.” On Lydia as a culture open to both ancient Greece and the Near East, see

- Christopher H. Roosevelt, *The Archaeology of Lydia: From Gyges to Alexander* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 3.
- 78 On Herodotus as a genuine source of ancient Near Eastern lore, with access to “far-reaching ideas,” not necessarily in the form of studying Assyrian, Babylonian, or Hittite texts, see Robert Rollinger, “Herodotus and the Intellectual Heritage of the Ancient Near East,” in Aro and Whiting, eds., *Heirs of Assyria*, 56–83. Along these lines, see also Haubold, *Greece and Mesopotamia*, 12, 77, and 126.
- 79 Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer*, 280–292.
- 80 Pindar, *Pythian* 3.105–106; Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer*, 280.
- 81 Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer*, 280–92. As far as the sensual connotations of the scene are concerned, see also, Scott B. Noegel, “Dismemberment, Creation, and Ritual: Images of Divine Violence in the Ancient Near East,” in James Wellman, ed., *Belief and Bloodshed: Religion and Violence across Time and Tradition*, 13–27 (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007) 21, where reference is made to the ritual bed “placed in a temple garden on which the god Marduk and the goddess Ishtar were believed to make love.”
- 82 Root, “Elam in the Imperial Imagination,” 452.
- 83 Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner, *Sculptures from the Southwest Palace*, 94–100, pls. 286–320.
- 84 See above, n. 15.
- 85 For a historical overview of the reigns of the Sargonid kings, see Oates and Oates, *Nimrud*, 22–25.
- 86 For a synoptic overview of the sources of personal insecurity for the last great Assyrian kings, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, see Mario Liverani, “The Fall of the Assyrian Empire,” in Susan Alcock et al., eds., *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History*, 374–91 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 386–89. On the text known as *The Sin of Sargon*, see Hayim Tadmor, Benno Landsberger, and Simo Parpola, “The Sin of Sargon and Sennacherib’s Last Will,” *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 3 (1989) 3–32; Ann M. Weaver, “The ‘Sin of Sargon’ and Esarhaddon’s Reconception of Sennacherib: A Study in Divine Will, Human Politics and Royal Ideology,” in Collon and George, eds., *Nineveh*, vol. 1, 61–66. On the occurrences of the “substitute king” ritual in Assyria, especially during the reigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, see Jean Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*, trans. Zainab Bahrani and Marc Van De Mieroop (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992) 146.
- 87 Liverani, “Fall of the Assyrian Empire,” 387–88.
- 88 The relevant section is missing from the Standard Babylonian version of the epic, but preserved in a “fragmentary prose paraphrase, written in Hittite, which was based on an older version of the epic” (George, *Epic of Gilgamesh*, vol. 1, 54–55).
- 89 For a discussion of the role of Humbaba as the appointed guardian of the Cedar Forest sacred to Enlil and the sacrilege committed against him and the Forest by Gilgamesh and Enkidu, see Tracy Davenport, “An Anti-Imperialist Twist to ‘The Gilgameš Epic,’” in Joseph Azize and Noel Weekds, eds., *Gilgameš and the World of Assyria: Proceedings of the Conference Held at Mandelbaum House, The University of Sydney, 21–23 July 2004*, 1–23, Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement 21 (Leuven, Paris, and Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2007) 9–10.
- 90 Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 257. In fact, Noegel has suggested that the rhetoric of violence in the art of the ancient Near East is full of allusions to the mythical “methods by which order was originally imposed in the cosmos” (“Images of Divine Violence,” 19). From this vantage point, he has seen in the “Garden Scene” both an expression of fertility through the royal couple and one of cosmic order through the “contrasting images of divinely sanctioned atrocities that surround the garden scene” (*ibid.*, 21).
- 91 Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer*, 83.
- 92 Bahrani (*Rituals of War*, 35) aptly notes in relation to Teumman’s beheading: “The execution of a king is an extraordinary act in any political theology. Because the king is consecrated and outside the law, the death of a king is always exceptional.”
- 93 “Landscape Bas-Reliefs,” continued from *BASOR* 224, 31–32, citing Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, vol. II, no. 855, in which Ashurbanipal describes the Elamites as a “dense swarm of grasshoppers.”
- 94 Compare, for instance, the depictions of Tiglath-Pileser III and Sennacherib enthroned illustrated in Barnett, *Sculptures of Aššur-našir-apli*

II, pl. XIX; and Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner, *Sculptures from the Southwest Palace*, pls. 335 and 342–43, respectively.

- 95 Ornan (“Queen in Public,” 474) indicates that the attributes of the Assyrian queen are primarily those characterizing the male royal figure, with the exception of the mural crown, which she considers to be “an innovative element used specifically for displaying Neo-Assyrian royal women.” She points out that the figural type of the Assyrian queen appears in the visual record for the first time during the reign of Sennacherib, perhaps again with a degree of Syrian inspiration (*ibid.*, 473). Ornan (*ibid.*, 475) states that the reconstruction of the ninth-century BCE fragmentary glazed tile featuring the mural crown is questionable and the gender of the figure depicted not determined. On this matter, see also Reade, “Was Sennacherib a Feminist?” 139; Börker-Klähn, “Mauerkronenträgerinnen,” 228–29; Macgregor, *Beyond Hearth and Home*, 89, n. 195. See Macgregor, *Beyond Hearth and Home*, 114, on the highly royal nature of Neo-Assyrian queenship and its representation, especially the mural crown. See, furthermore, Börker-Klähn, “Mauerkronenträgerinnen,” 230–34, for the relevance of the North Syrian/Southeastern Anatolian Neo-Hittite figural and architectural traditions to the theme of the Neo-Assyrian mural crown. Börker-Klähn posits that the theme was rooted in the Hittite Empire period, arguing that the *poloi* worn by the Yazılıkaya goddesses are mural crowns, a position questioned by Ornan (“Queen in Public,” 475). Interesting to observe, however, are the Syrian associations of the entire relief, including the banquet, the royal pair holding flowers, the mural crown, not to mention the location of the slab, the upper-level of what may be the *bīt-hilāni*, the Late Hittite-style portico, mentioned numerous times in the royal inscriptions of Sargon II and Sennacherib (Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, vol. II, nos. 73, 84, 100, 102, 105, 110, 112; Grayson and Novotny, *Inscriptions of Sennacherib* I, 1, l. 82). The Syrian element in this relief and its implications deserve further study and elaboration.
- 96 C. L. Crouch, “Ištar and the Motif of the Cosmological Warrior: Assurbanipal’s Adaptation of *Enuma Elish*,” in Gordon and Barstad, eds., “*Thus Speaks Ishtar of Arbela*,” 129–41, esp. 137–38, citing Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, 38 (7:2) for the former text; and R. Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996) IIT 5, for the latter.
- 97 For a basic description of the banqueting couple, see Macgregor, *Beyond Hearth and Home*, 90. See also the description in Root, “Elam in the Imperial Imagination,” 452.
- 98 See above, n. 5. Porter, “Ishtar of Nineveh,” emphasizes the two goddesses as partners, each with a distinct persona. On the crucial role of Ishtar in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, with sanctuaries in Assur, Nineveh, and Arbela, see Börker-Klähn, “Mauerkronenträgerinnen,” 228; Lambert, “Ištar of Nineveh,” esp. 35, which cites a third Ishtar, that of the city of Assur, and furthermore poses the question whether these three goddesses should be conceived of as separate deities “or three manifestations in different localities of a single deity.” Lambert (*ibid.*, 35 and 37) presents the Sumerian Inanna and her “Babylonian-Assyrian” counterpart Ishtar as one of the most ancient and fundamental deities of ancient Mesopotamian religion, with roots possibly in the Neolithic and an afterlife in classical antiquity. Despite the essential differences among the Ishtars of Nineveh, Arbela, and Assur, it is fair to consider overarching notions connected with the symbolism of Ishtar shared by all. On the interconnectedness of the three Ishtars, see also Beckman, “Ištar of Nineveh,” 7. On allusions to Ishtar of Arbela and a sexualized conception of the New Year’s or *akitu* celebrations in the “Garden Scene,” see Root, “Elam in the Imperial Imagination,” 447–48.
- 99 Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, vol. II, nos. 833, 1041, 1071.
- 100 Ambos, “Libbāli-šarrat,” 660.
- 101 Highly revealing in this regard is a similar reading of the mural crown by Herzfeld (*Persian Empire*, 265–66) as the “Eternal City,” but in reference to Susa, not Nineveh, on account of the imagery’s revolving around the conquest of Elam, as quoted by Root (“Elam and the Imperial Imagination,” 451) in endorsing Herzfeld’s interpretation of the female figure as an Elamite royal woman.
- 102 See, again, Calmeyer, “Mauerkrone,” where the afterlife of the motif of the mural crown in later antiquity is addressed; a second related type, the crenellated crown, featured in the Achaemenid Persian royal

- figure, is introduced; and the question whether the Hittite goddess figures of the Yazılıkaya rock sanctuary wear an earlier version of the crown is posed. On the Hittite and Achaemenid Persian versions, see also W. Deonna, “Histoire d’un emblème: La couronne murale des villes et pays personnifiés,” *Genava* 18 (1940) 119–236, esp. 144 and 148, respectively; and *ibid.*, 158 for a more general typology of the mural crown divided into three kinds, *dentelée*, *à gradin*, and *tourelée*. The Assyrian queen wearing a version of the mural crown, with a cone at its center, like the cone of the Assyrian royal headdress, also appears in two stamp seal impressions found at Sennacherib’s palace at Nineveh, on which see Reade, “Was Sennacherib a Feminist?” 144–45. The distinction between the Achaemenid Persian crenellated crown and the mural crown is also noted in Root, “Elam in the Imperial Imagination,” 450, n. 109; and Root, “Defining the Divine,” 37–43.
- 103 Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner, *Sculptures from the Southwest Palace*, pls. 322–34 and 349–51. Bahrani (*Rituals of War*, 10) points out the ontological link between warfare and the city in ancient Mesopotamian culture.
- 104 The walled city is an especially recurrent motif in the battle reliefs of Sety I, on which, see Epigraphic Survey, *The Battle Reliefs of King Sety I*, The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications 107, Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak 4 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1986).
- 105 Börker-Klähn, “Mauerkronenträgerinnen,” 230–34.
- 106 For one of the best examples, see Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, pl. 231.
- 107 Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 293. The ancient Egyptian netherworld, too, “is called the Great City because of its large number of inhabitants” (Hornung, *Books of the Afterlife*, 34).
- 108 See the classic study, Deonna, “Histoire d’un emblème,” 140–42, on the iconic depiction of the city as a quintessentially ancient Near Eastern visual topos, rather than Greek, with a note also on how the poetic image of the city in ancient Greek literature, too, is mostly attached to cities in Asia, such as Troy. Along these lines it is also Asiatic goddesses who are shown with the mural crown in classical antiquity. Deonna aptly relates even the architectural plan on the tablet held by Gudea on the knees of his Statue B with the same architectural idiom of turrets and crenellated battlements.
- 109 In Douglas Fraser, Howard Hibbard, and Milton J. Lewine, eds., *Essays in the History of Architecture Presented to Rudolf Wittkower*, 1–12 (New York: Phaidon, 1967).
- 110 For a more extended discussion of this question, see Mehmet-Ali Ataç, “The Neo-Assyrian Citadel-City and the Walled City as Theme in the Visual Representation of Imperialism,” in Nina Ergin and Scott Redford, eds., *Cities and Citadels in Turkey: From the Iron Age to the Seljuks*, 39–66, Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement 40 (Leuven, Paris, and Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2013).
- 111 Deonna, “Historie d’un emblème,” 130.
- 112 *Ibid.*, 157–59, drawing attention to the pedigree of the figural type of Tyche of Antioch in the fourth century BCE, especially in the images of goddesses of ancient Near Eastern derivation such as Astarte-Atargatis, Cybele, and Artemis of Ephesus, who all, like Tyche, were founders and protectors of their cities, and on whom Tyche was eventually superimposed within Asiatic contexts.
- 113 *Ibid.*, 135–36.
- 114 *Ibid.*, 134–38.
- 115 According to Maier (“Daughter Zion as Queen”), the earliest attestation of the turreted mural crown is in the art of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. In the Hellenistic period, it first becomes an emblem of autonomous cities; it is later merged with the Greek figure of Tyche. Maier also presents biblical evidence for a conceptualization of Jerusalem both as female and as a crown. The image of the crown is both in the form of a diadem and a city wall. The passages cited by Maier all pertain to the future vindication of Jerusalem and its transformed status and fortune. Also revealing in this regard is Roland Tefnin’s pointing to the round walled city of the Syrian type, such as Kadesh as it is depicted in the well-known temple reliefs of Ramesses II showing the Battle of Kadesh, as the prototype of the visual conceptualizations of the Celestial Jerusalem in Christian iconography: “Image, écriture, récit: À propos des représentations de la Bataille de Qadesh,” *Göttinger Miszellen* 47 (1981) 55–78, esp. 73.

- 116 “Mural Crowns in the Ancient Near East and Greece,” *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin: An Obsession with Fortune: Tyche in Greek and Roman Art* (1994) 76–85, esp. 79–80.
- 117 See Porter, “Ishtar of Nineveh,” 41, which cites an Ashurbanipal Hymn (K. 1290; Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, 10–13) praising both Ishtar of Nineveh and Ishtar of Arbela, and indicating that the goddesses pronounced favorable destinies for the king: “The Lady of Nineveh, the mother who bore me, endowed me with unparalleled kingship; the Lady of Arbela, my creator ordered everlasting life (for me). They decreed my fate to exercise dominion over all inhabited regions.” See also Lambert, “Ištar of Nineveh,” 38, where another prayer collated by the Assyriologist is presented in transliteration and translation, referring to the goddess as “massive jackal/vulture, who takes decisions and decrees fates.” See, furthermore, Selz, “Five Divine Ladies,” 37, where “[a] few lines from a hymn by Enheduanna to Inanna, in-nin-ša-gur₄-ra, in the translation of Å. W. Sjöberg” (“in-nin ša-gur₄-ra,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 65 [1975] 161–253) are quoted (vv. 114 and 119): “Without you no destiny at all is determined, no clever counsel is granted favour” / “To destroy, to build up, to tear out and to settle are yours, Inana(k).” The latter verse also speaks to Inanna’s role as a destructive and regenerative force.
- 118 For an understanding of the Greek goddess Tyche as “the director and manager of all things, ... and knowing the future” in the works of the fourth-century BCE Greek poet Menander, see Susan B. Matheson, “The Goddess Tyche,” *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin* (1994) 18–33, esp. 22; as well as 23, mentioning the fusion of Tyche with the Roman goddess Fortuna, who “became a goddess with control over individuals and cities, events, and even days.”
- 119 Grayson and Novotny, *Inscriptions of Sennacherib* 1, 1, ll. 63–65; 17.5, ll. 23–33. On the celestial implications of the city of Nineveh in this passage, see Rochberg, *Heavenly Writing*, 1; and Eckart Frahm, “The Great City: Nineveh in the Age of Sennacherib,” *The Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies Journal* 3 (2008) 13–120, esp. 18.
- 120 Nissinen, “City as Lofty as Heaven,” 176–77, citing Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, 8.
- 121 See Nissinen, “City as Lofty as Heaven” for a discussion on the connection between the Assyrian city as a center of prophecy and city as an image or trope in Assyrian prophetic texts, with its meaning rooted in conceptions of a divine foundation or “City of God.” Perhaps the most salient allusion to prophecy in the “Garden Scene” is the decapitated head of Teumman in light of an ancient oracle delivered to Ashurbanipal, mentioned in his royal inscriptions: “I, Assurbanipal, king of Assyria, displayed publicly the head of Teumman, king of Elam, in front of the gate inside the city, where from of old it had been said by the oracle: ‘The head of thy foes thou shalt cut off’” (Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, vol. II, no. 1047); on which see also Bahrani, *Rituals of War*, 41. For references to prophecy in Ashurbanipal’s accounts of the Elamite battles, see Martti Nissinen, *References to Prophecy in Neo-Assyrian Sources*, State Archives of Assyria Studies 7 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1998) 43–61, esp. 52–55, concerning Teumman; Villard, “Prophéties,” 77–78. According to Crouch (“Ištar and the Motif of the Cosmological Warrior,” 133), the Ulai River Battle “appears to have begun while Assurbanipal was engaged in the worship of Ištar at Arbela.” The interplay between the proliferation in the practice of prophecy during the reigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal and the visual arts, especially the Elamite battles of the latter king, deserves further study.
- 122 Reade, “Was Sennacherib a Feminist?” 140 and 142, where the novel depiction of the god Ashur with a female consort in the art of Sennacherib is also noted. For an overview of the archaeological evidence for Neo-Assyrian queenship, especially the Nimrud queens’ burials, see Gansell, “Women in Ancient Mesopotamia,” 19–23. Neo-Assyrian queenship and the role of the royal women at the Neo-Assyrian court are beyond the scope of this study. These matters have been treated extensively in recent scholarly studies, especially Sarah Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zaqutu in Sargonid Politics*, State Archives of Assyria Studies 9 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1999); Macgregor, *Beyond Hearth and Home*; Saana Svärd, *Power and Women in the Neo-Assyrian Palaces* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, Department of World Cultures, 2012); Kertai, “Queens.”

- 123 In this regard, see Sanders, “First Tour of Hell,” 167–69.
- 124 According to Coomaraswamy, on the path of individual liberation, “those who reach the summit, if still callow, fall down, if fully fledged fly away” (“Janua Coeli,” 12).
- 125 Kramer and Maier, *Myths of Enki*, 166–78, esp. 172.
- 126 For the most recent treatment of the ancient Greek and Near Eastern successions myths, with a plea for greater attention paid to the Ugaritic sources, see López-Ruiz, *When the Gods Were Born*, 84–129.
- 127 For a detailed discussion, see Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, Part 3: “The Semantics of Sages and *Mischwesen* in Neo-Assyrian Art and Thought.”
- 128 Karl Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996) 93–128.
- 129 On deeds of warfare and weapons characterizing the gradual deterioration of subsequent generations in Hesiod, see Koenen, “Cyclic Destruction,” 3–4 and 9.
- 130 See Adler, *Vergil’s Empire*, 147–64, where it is stated that according to Vergil’s scheme, the Saturnian Golden Age was not without its imperfections, especially inasmuch as “it lacked whatever is needed for permanence, and thus could not prevent a baser age from following” (160). In this regard, as Adler writes, “what enabled Saturn to begin the humanization of men was his appearing among them in his manifest divinity, on the strength of which they accepted his laws that enabled them to live together safely. But the humanization he began cannot be secured except by universalizing it. This is the meaning of Anchises’ prophecy to Aeneas that Augustus Caesar, the offspring of a god, will not only re-found the Golden Age in Latium where Saturn first founded it, but will this time extend it to the ends of the earth (VI 791–797); and of Jupiter’s prophecy to Venus that the future Caesar, who will ‘measure empire by Ocean’ and himself ultimately be deified, will usher in the peaceable age that has neither borders nor times (I 286–296)” (164). See also R. G. M. Nisbet, “Virgil’s Fourth Eclogue: Easterners and Westerners,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 25 (1978) 59–78, esp. 61–62. On the lack of fulfillment or fruition in the temporality of the *Aeneid* and the poem’s emphasis, rather, on the ongoing “journey,” see Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 93. On empire as “the definitive eschatological power” in the Book of Daniel, see David Flusser, “The Four Empires in the Fourth Sibyl and in the Book of Daniel,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972) 148–75, esp. 157.
- 131 See above, [Chapter 2](#), n. 3.
- 132 Andrae, *Farbige Keramik*, pl. 8.
- 133 Ataç, “Time and Eternity.”
- 134 See Murphy, *Apocalypticism*, 9 and forward, for overviews of the relevant narratives of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic. Conflict is also central to Zoroastrian apocalyptic as summarized by Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos*, 101 and 114.
- 135 On the sources for conceptions of world ages and eschatology in Vergil, especially Eclogue 4, with a discussion of the Sibylline, Etruscan, Stoic, Platonic, and Pythagorean traditions, see Susanna Morton Braund, “Virgil and the Cosmos: Religious and Philosophical Ideas,” in Charles Martindale, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Vergil*, 204–21 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 208–10 and 216–18.
- 136 On Vergil’s scheme for Rome’s embracing even the regions “beyond the paths of the sun and the year” as one of the manifestations of the notion of liberating history from the “law of cosmic cycles,” see Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return*, 136. On Vergil’s poems as collections of “the eschatological traditions of antiquity, both Roman and Greek,” see Hubert Cancik, “The End of the World, of History, and of the Individual in Greek and Roman Antiquity,” in Collins, ed., *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 1, 84–125, esp. 117.
- 137 See above, [Introduction](#), n. 12, on Lincoln’s not clarifying this matter in relation to the Achaemenid Persian notions of restoration he reads in art and texts.
- 138 On Vergil’s drawing on both eastern and western sources and his combining the Hesiodic sense of the world ages with that of the Sibylline oracles and the Etruscan tradition of the *saecula*, see Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 92. See also again Nisbet, “Virgil’s Fourth Eclogue,” 59–78, where emphasis is also placed on Vergil’s adapting in his work ideas of possible “eastern” origin to distinctively “western” modes of thought.
- 139 Murphy, *Apocalypticism*, 178.
- 140 Eclogue 4 (4–7): “Now is come the last age of the song of Cumae; the great line of

the centuries begins anew. Now the Virgin returns, the reign of Saturn returns; now a new generation descends from heaven on high” (H. Rushton Fairclough, *Virgil: Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I–VI*, The Loeb Classical Library [Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1994 (1935)] 28–29). The Sibylline oracles, too, describe a “king from the sun” (3.652) (Nisbet, “Virgil’s Fourth Eclogue,” 61). In this regard, see also Murphy, *Apocalypticism*, 186. Also associated with the sun in Jewish apocalyptic is the figure of Enoch, “fashioned after Mesopotamian prototypes, especially Enmeduranki,” who in turn was associated with the sun-god Šamaš and known to have been “admitted into the divine assembly and shown mysteries that included the tablets of heaven and the techniques of divination” (John J. Collins, *Seers, Sibyls, and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism* [Boston, MA: Brill Academic, 2001] 44–45). On texts related to Enmeduranki, see W. G. Lambert, “Enmeduranki and Related Matters,” *JCS* 24 (1971–72) 126–38. On the relation between Enmeduranki and Enoch, see also Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalyptic*, 24–31. On Enmeduranki and Enoch, see also above, [Chapter 5](#), n. 112.

[141](#) *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism*, Dissertation Series 13 (Society of Biblical Literature and Scholars’ Press, 1974) 98. Collins does emphasize, nevertheless, that the Sibylline oracles were less of a product of Hellenistic syncretism than biblical Judaism (*ibid.*, 112–18). Schmithals (*Apocalyptic Movement*, 172–74) makes a distinction between “prophetic eschatology,” understood as an intrahistorical hope of salvation enabled by a savior king, with which he sees the Old Testament in greater harmony; and apocalyptic, a radical divine intervention from beyond history whereby the end-time is ushered in. On the contrast between prophetic eschatology and the apocalyptic, see also Murphy, *Apocalypticism*, 7 and 21.

[142](#) On the Book of Enoch and the Sibylline Oracles in relation to the history of research on Jewish apocalyptic, see Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalyptic*, 3.

[143](#) *Ibid.*, 88. On Melchizedek, see also Annus, “Ninurta and the Son of Man,” 12.

[144](#) See Grant Macaskill, *The Slavonic Texts of 2 Enoch*, *Studia Judaica* 6 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2013) 321–22. Even though

this text is preserved in a fourteenth-century Slavonic translation, a Hebrew origin in the first century CE is often assumed. In this regard, see Christfried Böttrich, “The ‘Book of the Secrets of Enoch’ (2 En): Between Jewish Origin and Christian Transmission: An Overview,” in Andrei A. Orlov and Gabriele Boccaccini, eds., *New Perspectives on 2 Enoch: No Longer Slavonic Only*, 37–68, *Studia Judaica* 4 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill 2012) 38. According to Macaskill (*Slavonic Texts of 2 Enoch*, 3), opinions on the date of the book “have ranged from a Jewish authorship in 1st century Alexandria to a monastic authorship in 10th century Byzantium.”

[145](#) Birger A. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, *Studies in Antiquity and Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1990) 111–22. A recent study on Melchizedek as priest-king and an eschatological or messianic figure in the Old Testament and other Jewish writings is Joshua G. Matthews, *Melchizedek’s Alternative Priestly Order: A Compositional Analysis of Genesis 14:18–20 and Its Echoes throughout the Tanak*, *Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement* 8 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013).

[146](#) “Jewish Apocalyptic,” 30.

[147](#) *Ibid.* In this respect, the topos of the “king from the sun” can also be found in Hellenistic Egypt, in the “Potter’s Oracle”; and in Persia as well, in the “Oracle of Hystaspes” (*ibid.*, 29; Collins, *Sibylline Oracles*, 41). Collins (*Sibylline Oracles*, 104) also suggests a parallel between the Sibylline writings and an account of Zoroastrian cosmology found in Plutarch, *De Iside Osiride* 47, whereby “the world process will end eventually and definitively with the victory of the good.” If the Achaemenid Persian winged-disk is indeed a representation of Ahura-Mazda, the supreme deity of Zoroastrianism, and if the Persians drew on the symbolism of the Assyrian winged-disk in appropriating it, one might consider the semantics of the winged-disk in both Assyria and Achaemenid Persia within an analogous eschatological framework. Ancient Iranian notions of time and eschatology could in fact be an important resource with which to compare the relevant Assyrian matters. For a discussion of past research on the influence of Persian religion on Judaism as well as on parallels between Enochic and Persian literature, see Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalyptic*, 6–7 and 10.

- 148 “Jewish Apocalyptic,” 27 and 34. One should keep in mind, however, that in addition to the influence of the contemporary socio-political circumstances, a genuine mystical and philosophical agenda must have existed behind apocalyptic literature. In this regard, see Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalyptic*, I, II, 37–38.
- 149 For a detailed study of the ancient Mesopotamian “roots of the Enochic and Danielic apocalyptic,” see again *Roots of Apocalyptic*.
- 150 Porter, “Ishtar of Nineveh and Her Collaborator,” 41, where the Ashurbanipal hymn to both goddesses indicates that it was not the king’s own actions but “the power [...] and] strength of my goddesses” that defeated his enemies in battle; Lambert, “Ištar of Nineveh,” 38, where the prayer presented in transliteration and translation refers to Ishtar as the “Anūnītum of battles.”
- 151 Crouch, “Ištar and the Motif of the Cosmological Warrior,” 135–36, including quotations from the relevant texts.
- 152 A judicious critique of the standard view of Ishtar simply as a goddess of sexual love and war can be found in Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, XXIX, in which the potency in Ishtar to transcend all the polarities and contraries, especially those of the male and female, is highlighted. On Ishtar’s encompassing all by herself the polarization of the sexes, see also Selz, “Five Divine Ladies,” 38. Beyond the basic understanding of the literal military success of the Assyrian king, Parpola (*Assyrian Prophecies*, XXXI) also rightly interprets notions of warfare associated with Ishtar as aspects of holy war, conducted against the forces of darkness and evil. On matters of holy war in Assyrian imperial ideology in relation to the manifestation of divine support through prophecy, see Nissinen, *References*, 54 and 165. On the warrior aspect of Ishtar, manifest in the goddess ^dINANA-*An-nu-ni-tum*, “Ishtar, the skirmisher,” see Selz, “Five Divine Ladies,” 34, mentioning also the effort “spent on the analysis and identification of the pictorial representation of this goddess.” On Ishtar’s appearance on Neo-Assyrian seals as a god surrounded by intense radiance, see also Stein, “Winged Disks and Sacred Trees,” 598, n. 60.
- 153 For a study of motifs on the earlier Neo-Assyrian decorated garments in relief, see Jeanny Vorys Canby, “Decorated Garments in Ashurnasirpal’s Sculpture,” *Iraq* 33 (1971) 31–53. See Collins, *Assyrian Palace Sculptures*, 119 and 123, for illustrations of the lion hunt reliefs of Ashurbanipal in which the “sacred tree” flanked by two royal figures and surmounted by the winged disk appears as garment decoration, even though the royal hunt is not strictly speaking a “historical” genre, in the sense that, say, the Elamite battles are.
- 154 In Christian and Iranian (Zoroastrian) eschatology, within the larger sequence of a destruction of the old world and the establishment of a permanent and incorruptible order, there exists the return, or re-introduction, of paradisiac conditions to the earth again as an intermediate stage after the initial destruction and before the ultimate restoration. According to the *Apocalypse of Paul*, “[w]hen the first earth – ours – is destroyed, this other will descend from the firmament to replace it, and the saints will dwell there with Jesus for a thousand years” (Delumeau, *History of Paradise*, 27). See, furthermore, Schmithals, *Apocalyptic Movement*, 174–85, for the “messianic age” or the “messianic interregnum,” which is about the return of the “age of Paradise” for a finite period of time, before it is dissolved by the Son of Man who ushers the new incorruptible aeon.

EPILOGUE

- 1 For a statement that an all-pervasive underlying programme, one that is not easily accessible, “links together all the parts and the hundreds of figures” of the Sistine ceiling paintings, see O’Malley, S.J., “Theology,” 107.
- 2 See Coomaraswamy, *Time and Eternity*, 40: “The Freedman, in fact, ‘transcends the aeons,’ ... ‘not a man of the aeons’; ‘they call him “awake” (*Buddha*) who discerns the aeons, the flux of things in which they fall and rise ..., one for whom birth ... is at an end’.”
- 3 Grayson, *Assyrian Periods* 2, 275. This reading of the relief was first presented in Burchard Brentjes, “Selbstverherrlichung oder Legitimitätsanspruch? Gedanken zu dem Thronrelief von Nimrud-Kalah,” *Altorientalische Forschungen* 21 (1994) 50–64; and has been revisited and reworked by Brian Brown, “Kingship and Ancestral Cult in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud,” *JANER* 10 (2010) 1–53.

- 4 In this respect, see J. S. Cooper, "Incongruent Corpora: Writing and Art in Ancient Iraq," in Paul Taylor, ed., *Iconography without Texts*, 69–94, Warburg Institute Colloquia 13 (London: Warburg Institute, Turin: Nino Aragno) 80, n. 67, considering the most sensible interpretation of the Assyrian "sacred tree" to be the tree as cult object. A plea for seeing the tree first and foremost in a symbolic framework before material or cultic can be found in Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 268.
- 5 A cogent critique of seeing Neo-Assyrian historical narrative exclusively as a documentary reflection of Assyrian "ideology," especially along the axis of "mimetic" truthfulness, can be found in Bahrani, *Rituals of War*, 50–55 and 73–74.

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